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- Max Payne
- Wizardry 8
- Black & White

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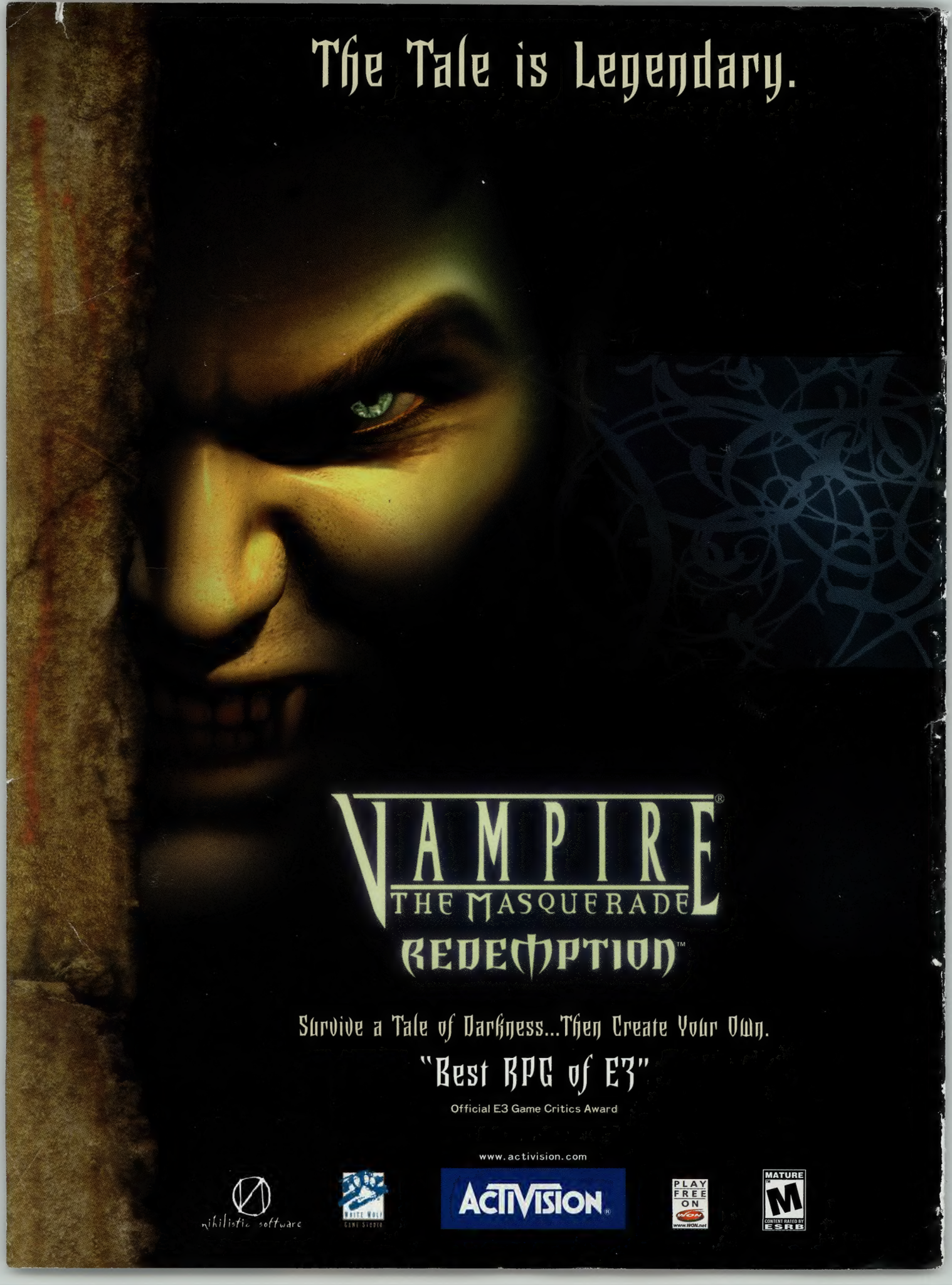
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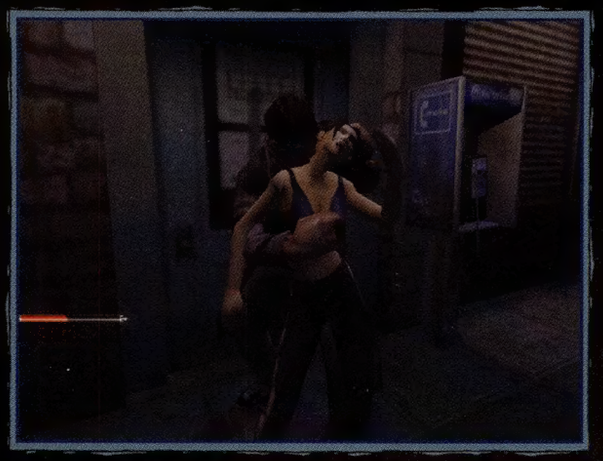
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Cover Illustration by John Alvin

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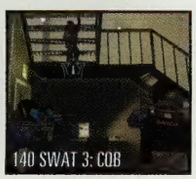


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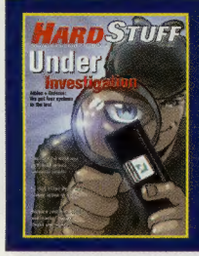
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Letter from the Ed.



Don't threaten me with a dead fish!

Gary wasn't lying in his final address last issue. He's moved on to pastures new, there's a new face at the top of this page (er, sorry to inflict that on you, but they insist), and the office is drowning in a sea of awesome ideas to make *PC Gamer* better still. So, welcome: I'm Rob, and I'll be your guide through the future of PC gaming.

What should you expect to see moving forward in *PC Gamer*? Well, I guarantee you're going to continue to see quality stories about the games you really want to know about. You're also going to see Scoops, Reviews, and Hard Stuff in a format that's entertaining, accessible, and informative. And this is where you get involved.

You may notice that the movie quote contest is still in place — and it's a tough one to kick off the season — but I want to make you work for those free copies of *Alpha Centauri* and *Alien Crossfire*. Not only do you need to name the movie, but also need to include in your entry your thoughts on *PC Gamer*. A like, a dislike, a story idea, a comment, a "welcome" or just a joke — send the entries to *ednote@pcgamer.com*. We're going to get better, and we're going to do it with your help.

So, welcome once again. It's great to be here in the best job in the PC games industry. Oh wait, that would be Lara Croft's animator/*PC Accelerator*'s cover model photographer/John Romero.

Well, I'll take what I can get.

Rob Smith

Rob Smith,
Editor-in-Chief

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THAT'S FIVE BILLION BITS, FOR THOSE WHO PREFER THEIR GOODNESS IN BINARY FORM

That's an impressive number. Just think, a mere ten years ago your hard drive might have held 40MB, if you were lucky, which you'd fill through your 1200 baud modem. That's just enough space to install this month's *Missile Command* demo, but forget about anything left over for an operating system. But thanks to Moore's Law and a few good people at *PC Gamer*, you now have a plastic disc that holds a half-Gigabyte, brimming with spectacular game demos. Incredible. Like Paul McCartney and Mr. Moore said, things get better all the time.

To enjoy the demos, just slide *The CD* into your CD-ROM drive and wait for the handsome interface to appear. Choose a game, read the README, and launch the install. It's that simple.

Unfortunately, we can't provide technical support for the games contained on the disc. However, if the disc itself is scratched or defective, you can order a replacement from *http://support.imaginemedia.com*.

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FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND THE *PC GAMER CD*

SUPPORT

Click here to connect directly to *http://support.imaginemedia.com* for CD support.

ADD-ONS

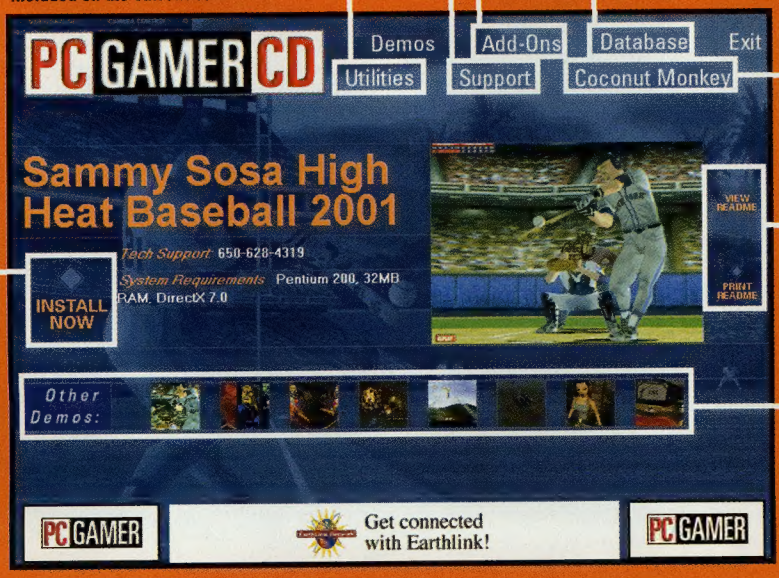
Try these add-ons for the latest games, including new levels and maps.

UTILITIES

Click here for a list of the utility programs included on the current CD.

DATABASE

Curious about past demos or reviews in the magazine? Check here for answers.



INSTALL

When you're ready to install the displayed demo, click this button to launch the setup program. It might help to close the interface at this time.

COCONUT MONKEY

What's that crazy Coconut Monkey up to nowadays? Find out by clicking here for Fan Art, Coconut Monkey's web site, and more!

THE README

View and Print the readme file for the selected demo. The Readme file usually contains technical information, control keys, and more.

THE DEMOS

Quickly and easily jump to the demo of your choice. Move the mouse over the picture to see a drop-down description of the demo, and click the picture to go directly there.

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SAMMY SOSA HIGH HEAT 2001

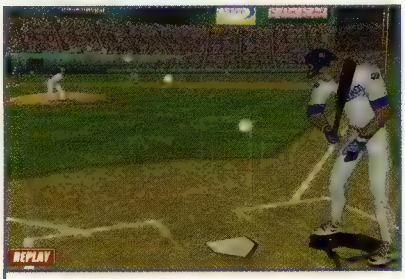


- **INSTALL:** \HighHeat\Setup.exe
- **TECH SUPPORT:** *www.3do.com*
- **CATEGORY:** Sports
- **COMPANY:** 3DO
- **REQUIRED:** Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, DirectX 7.0

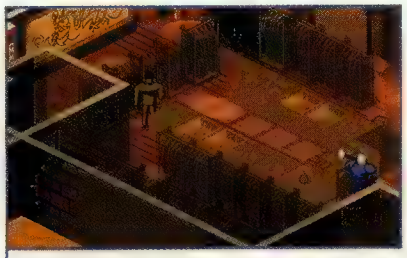
Drop some foot-long wieners on the grill and crack open a can of your favorite bubbling beverage, because we're taking you out to the ballgame. This third incarnation of High Heat is the finest yet, and does great justice to the great American pastime.

This demo allows you to play a three-inning game between the Boston Red Sox and the Arizona Diamondbacks, in any of three different stadiums. When you boot up the game, you'll find a menu with eight choices. Click "Exhibition." From the next menu, you can adjust a few settings, including day or night play and instant replays. On the following menu, you'll choose your team, park, and automatic settings. Some find the game more enjoyable with "Automatic Base Running" selected. When you're ready for the big leagues, hit "OK" and then "PLAYBALL!"

Definitely check the README file for control descriptions, and play with a gamepad if you have one. You'll find this is a challenging game with lots of replay value, even in its three-inning state.



The replay will give you an idea of how different pitch types cross the plate.



The backgrounds are hand-painted, and the characters move seamlessly through them.

SHADOW WATCH

- **INSTALL:** \ShadowWatch\Setup.exe
- **TECH SUPPORT:** (919) 460-9778
- **CATEGORY:** Turn-based strategy
- **COMPANY:** Red Storm
- **REQUIRED:** Pentium 133, 32MB RAM, DirectX 7.0

Fans of the X-COM series are going to dig this one. While there aren't any aliens in the game, it's a turn-based strategy played from a familiar isometric view. The highly styled visuals are ripped straight from a comic book, and the characters move through the maps so smoothly, it's as if each frame is painted with pastels.

Three maps and two modes of play are available in the demo — single-mission and campaign. Each single mission offers a different mission type (Assault, Raid, Theft, and Defend), which require altered strategies. The campaign tells a short story that will have you vying for the role of security chief for a large international corporation. You will interact with shady two-faced characters from the underworld, and subsequent missions will vary according to your conversations.

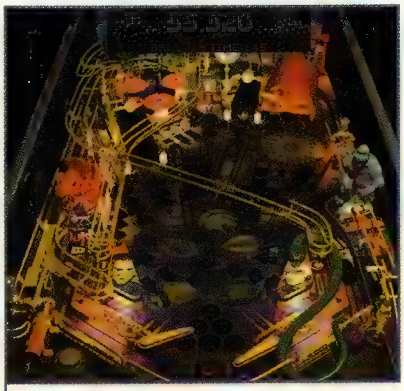
When setting out on a mission, you'll choose your party. Only Lily and Bear are available in the demo, but they're enough to get the job done. Lily's martial arts and silenced pistol can take out any thugs, and Bear's biceps can knock down any locked doors that stand in your way.

PRO PINBALL: FANTASTIC JOURNEY

- **INSTALL:** \FantasticJourney\Fjdemo.exe
- **TECH SUPPORT:** *www.empire-us.com*
- **CATEGORY:** Simulation
- **COMPANY:** Empire Interactive
- **REQUIRED:** Pentium 90, 16MB RAM, DirectX 7.0

If you enjoy the game of pinball, and you haven't heard of the Pro Pinball series, allow us to welcome you into a wonderful world of accurate pinball simulation. If you're down with the series, then you've probably already booted up the demo in haste.

The folks behind this game collect pinball machines as a hobby. Thus, they take the game of real-world physics very seriously. *Fantastic Journey*, their fourth simulation, is their most complicated effort yet, and incorporates all of their past successes. The story behind the game involves an evil chap bent on destroying the moon. It's up to the player and Professor Steam to collect four powerful green crystals and travel to his lair to save our lunar satellite. To do this, just shoot the lanes marked with flashing white arrows, and then into the boiler.



One enhancement over previous titles is a full-color LCD score screen at the top of the table.

NOX

- **INSTALL:** \Nox\Noxdemo.exe
- **TECH SUPPORT:** (650) 628-4319
- **CATEGORY:** Roleplaying
- **COMPANY:** Westwood Studios
- **REQUIRED:** Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, DirectX 7.0

Are you anything like our Technical Editor, Greg Vederman? God help him. The poor bastard spends every waking moment checking on the status of *Diablo II*. Thankfully, when *NOX* arrived in the office, he immediately hit the install and it seemed to stem his sorrow. If you find yourself in the same predicament, please, for the sake of your own mental health, check out this demo.

It's deathmatch only, but don't fret if you're without LAN access. The online component is consistently filled with hundreds of players, and doesn't require membership to any of the web services. Just be sure to install the Westwood Shared Internet Components when prompted.

After booting up the game, you will come to a map filled with flags. Click a green one. This will lead to another map where you'll do the same. Create a character (the demo only allows for conjurers) and enter the battlefield. Try to scurry around quickly to find some armor and a weapon. Use the mouse to move and the A-G keys to cast the spells listed on the bottom of the screen.

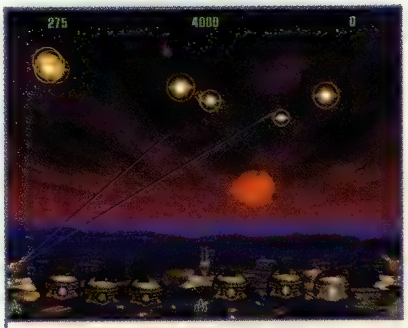


The line-of-sight model is one of the most impressive of its kind we've ever seen. You never know what's around the next corner.

MISSILE COMMAND

- INSTALL: \MissileCommand\MissileComDemo.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: *www.hasbrointeractive.com*
- CATEGORY: Arcade
- COMPANY: Hasbro
- REQUIRED: Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, DirectX 7.0

Surely no introduction is required. The arcade mother game is back from the dead with a whole new look and two modes of play, Classic and Ultimate. Use the mouse and the A-D keys to fire missiles in order to protect your cities and missile launchers.



Classic mode is every bit as fun as the original, and about 16 million times more colorful.



You can group any number of squadrons into various formations for battle.

SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR

- INSTALL: \Shogun\Setup.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: *www totalwar.com*
- CATEGORY: Strategy
- COMPANY: Electronic Arts
- REQUIRED: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM

The *Shogun* team has set out to create an RTS with strong realism. The game is based closely on feudal Japan, in terms of warrior types, methods of attacks, architecture, and topography. Amazingly, the game engine is capable of calculating thousands of units at one time. This demo is a series of self-explanatory training missions.

TOMB RAIDER: THE LOST ARTIFACT

- INSTALL: \TombRaider\tr_tlademo.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: www.tombraider.com
- CATEGORY: Action
- COMPANY: Eidos
- REQUIRED: Pentium 133, 16MB RAM, DirectX 7.0

I know this is confusing. We all thought *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation* was the final Lara Croft adventure. Well, it was. *The Lost Artifact* is an expansion pack to *Tomb Raider III*, and a darned good-looking one at that. Navigating the menus can be confusing; try the up and down arrows to access more options.



Avoid this diabolical bird at all costs. It'll peck your eyes out if you're not careful.



The first-person perspective is, while immersive, not for the weak of stomach.

SUPERBIKE 2000

- INSTALL: \Superbike2000\setup.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: *www.easportssuperbike.com/*
- CATEGORY: Racing
- COMPANY: EA Sports
- REQUIRED: Pentium 233, 32MB RAM, DirectX 7.0

EA Sports has outdone itself this time. The physics in this game are as realistic as the sharp, high-polygon graphics. There's one full track available in this demo, but visit the options screen before you head in. You might want to adjust the difficulty settings. Also, be absolutely sure to check out the different perspectives with the Function keys. The first-person perspective is killer.

EarthLink Sprint

EARTHLINK

- INSTALL: \Elink\Setup.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: (800) 395-8410
- CATEGORY: Online Service
- COMPANY: EarthLink
- REQUIRED: 486 or better, 8MB RAM, 35MB free disk space, 14.4Kbps or faster modem

EarthLink (*www.earthlink.net*) has really hit Internet-superstar status this year with numerous industry accolades, winning *PC Computing's* MVP Award and making *Fortune Magazine's* FORTUNe-50.

Now you can get 250 free hours of Internet service for one month, and unlimited access and membership perks for only $19.95 per month thereafter.

EarthLink membership has pretty much everything you need for the ultimate Internet experience. You get unlimited access, a generous 6MB of web space for your own site, a free Web page builder, and a Personal Start Page to bring you the Internet just the way you want it, every time you log on.

You'll also get free E-mail, multimedia plug-ins, your choice of browsers, and a free subscription to *bLink Magazine*, EarthLink's members-only publication — featuring Internet tips, news, and reviews, and even a regular column for gamers! As if that weren't enough, EarthLink also has its own online gaming site (*www.thegamesarena.com*).

If you ever find yourself with a question or two, EarthLink is renowned for its customer service and round-the-clock tech support. They provide over 2,300 local access numbers nationwide and speeds up to 56K, making an EarthLink connection as solid as you can get. And you can use the free EarthLink Fast Lane software to continually improve the quality of your Internet connection.

Check EarthLink out on the this month's CD. With the free, easy-to-install software, you can plug into EarthLink today and enjoy 250 free hours.

HAVING PROBLEMS?

We cannot provide technical support for problems you may encounter with demos on *The CD*. Please use the tech support numbers listed with the demos. You can also go to *www.pcgamer.com/cd-rom.html* on the Internet for a FAQ and other info.

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HALF-LIFE SINGLE-PLAYER SHOWDOWN

- **INSTALL:** \addons\showdown\
- **TECH SUPPORT:** You're on your own, pal!
- **CATEGORY:** Half-Life missions
- **COMPANY:** Various
- **REQUIRED:** Half-Life, Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, DirectX 7.0

You begged, you pleaded, and now we delivered. Welcome to the Single-Player Showdown, a listing of the top ten single-player add-ons for the now legendary shooter, *Half-Life*. The winners were chosen from a pool of hundreds and rated based on ambiance, architecture, strategy, enemy placement, and the all-important fun factor. Thanks to our friend Robert Volonnino at the TF2 Barracks (*http://barracks.thefortress.org*) for his expertise. Now, get installin'....

10 Map Name: Chronicles — Episode 1

Author: RadioActive Software
Release Date: 12/29/99
Web Site: *www.radioactivesoftware.com/*
File Size: 9.06MB



Using a scene from *Half-Life*, this map branches off into uncharted territory. The gameplay is fast and furious; there are new weapons, and an exciting rail-car chase at the end.

9 Map Name: Freeman's Revenge

Author: Dave Waters
Release Date: 2/27/99
Web Site: *www.planethalflife.com /3dconstruction*
File Size: 2.45MB



In *Freeman's Revenge*, you'll find yourself trapped inside a military base looking for an escape. This brilliant map's enemy placement and super-cool design make it a favorite among the many fans of single-player levels.

8 Map Name: Deliverance

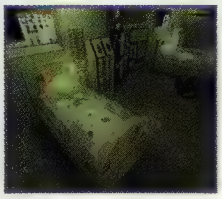
Author: Kevin Lockitt
Release Date: 2/9/00
Web Site: *www.planethalflife.com/ deliverance*
File Size: 6.73MB



Embark on a rescue mission to save the scientists from the hands of the military. Opening new doors inside the Black Mesa research facility, you'll find plenty of action.

7 Map Name: Two Smoking Barrels

Author: Martin Stephenson
Release Date: 3/30/99
Web Site: none
File Size: 2.96MB



Save the planet from alien invasion due to a malfunctioning teleporter that must be destroyed! This run-and-gun map offers a minimum amount of puzzles, but a maximum amount of enemies.

6 Map Name: Gut Reaction

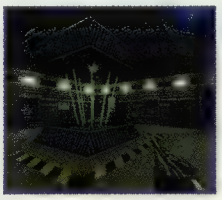
Author: Tim Johnston
Release Date: 11/16/99
Web Site: *www.digwig.com*
File Size: 5.01MB



This has everything for the fans of mission objective-type maps. Attempting to power down the nuclear reactor at the Lambda Complex, you'll battle through a puzzle-filled, challenging level.

5 Map Name: Mission of Mercy

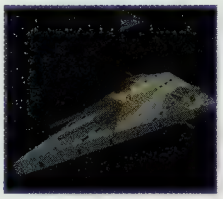
Author: Dave Waters
Release Date: 9/20/99
Web Site: *www.planethalflife.com /3dconstruction*
File Size: 3.53MB



Prepare to take on the toughest military troops in *Mission of Mercy*. In this episode, the evil G-man plots to blow-up Xen and the aliens are depending on you to save their planet, so get crackin'!

4 Map Name: The Xeno Project 2

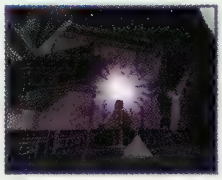
Author: Mr. White
Release Date: 11/10/99
Web Site: *www.planetquake.com/lm*
File Size: 5.7MB



Escaping imprisonment from a spaceship is a vital first step in saving the Earth! Death comes often because of the abundance of enemies, making this one of the toughest maps to complete.

3 Map Name: *PC Gamer* Presents: USS Darkstar

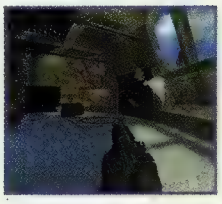
Author: Neil Manke
Release Date: 6/14/99
Web Site: *www.planethalflife.com/manke*
File Size: 10.6MB



In this first *PC Gamer* production, the year is 2066 and you're aboard the USS *Darkstar* on an alien zoological expedition when something goes wrong. With seamlessly integrated game play and exceptional architecture, *Darkstar* is a mind-scrambling single-player challenge.

2 Map Name: ETC

Author: Dave Johnston
Release Date: 3/8/99
Web Site: *www.3dgaming.com*
File Size: 5.31MB



ETC's action and suspense provides you with some of the best gun-to-gun combat that a single-player map could offer. Escaping the Earthquake Test Center is the mission, but don't get buried under the rubble of carnage!

1 Map Name: *PC Gamer* Presents: They Hunger

Author: Neil Manke
Release Date: 11/29/99
Web Site: *www.planethalflife.com/manke*
File Size: 15.8MB



They Hunger is a well-balanced mix of spooky puzzles, brilliantly designed textures and lighting with new enemy models. It's an ode to the classic horror genre wrapped into a terrific *Half Life* add-on, making it the number-one best single-player map of the Single-Player Showdown.



For maximum thrill, *They Hunger* must be played alone, at nighttime, with the lights out.


A seed planted with love
sometimes blossoms only regret.

FORGOTTEN REALMS

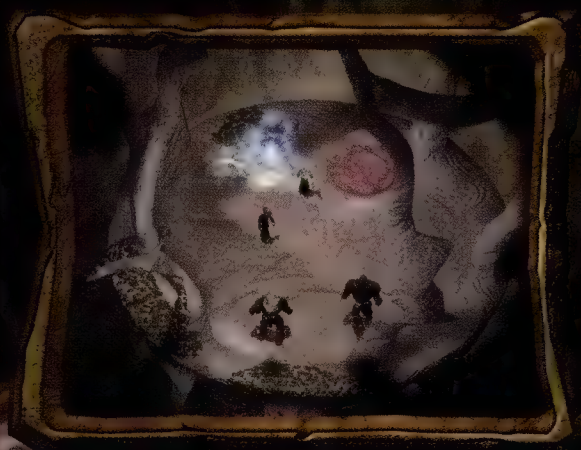
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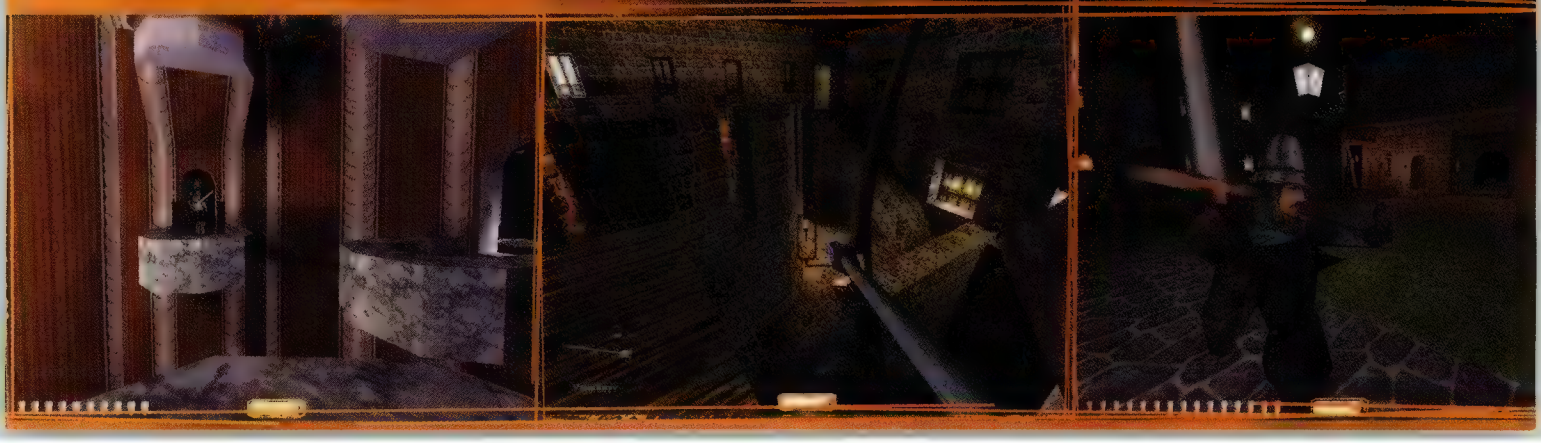
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Y'know the feeling when you're staring down the barrel of a gun...

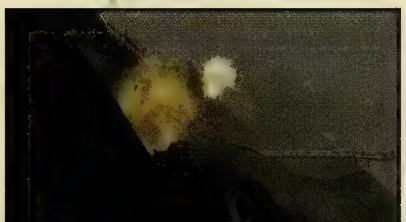
Tribes 2

Tribes was a diamond in the rough; the sequel strives for polish

There's no way to put it diplomatically, so I won't even try: *Starsiege Tribes* is a bad, bad thing. And soon, there'll be a lot more of that badness. Perhaps I should elaborate. *Quake* and *Unreal* are lodged in the social consciousness like the burning end of a Marlboro in one's right eye — there's no denying that. But *Tribes 2* tapped in to the community dynamic with a vengeance. Full on, hard-core *Tribes 2* web pages and entire web rings (complete with custom skins, mods, and original universe-based fiction) are going up before even the demo is available!

Of course, hard-core gamers did this with the original *Tribes,* too. Tribe loyalty went to extreme lengths, even so far as composing MP3 encoded fight songs? I'm not kidding! The social dynamic of the squad-based tactical action game hit like a powerful nervous-system stimulant, with many of the same results. As *Tribes 2* brings more players online, the potential for factional rivalries gets ever larger.

So what are the main differences between *Tribes* and *Tribes 2*? "We've rewritten everything. I guess that's what you'd call the first main difference," says *Tribes 2* software engineer Mark Frohnmayer. "It's totally revamped — a brand-new graphics engine with support for OpenGL only. The environments will pretty much speak for themselves, with the amount of detail we're going to be able to put in there."



Special effects such as explosions and weapons fire are all being revamped.

In the process of saying these words, Frohnmayer uses *Tribes 2's* massively expanded mission editor to drop an object — a metallic ramp, in this case — into the

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Online Action

DEVELOPER: Dynamix

PUBLISHER: Sierra, (800) 757-7707, *www.sierra.com*

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 70%

RELEASE DATE: Summer

IN A NUTSHELL: Tribes really helped pioneer team-based online action gaming. The sequel is still a first-person shooter at its core, but there aren't masses of destructive weapons. The vast, contoured levels create the challenges as much as the bases that are attacked and defended. The key to success is in controlling the jet-pack that lets you quickly cross vast distances on the map, or hitching a ride on one of the troop carriers.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL? Dynamix scrapped plans for add-ons to the original game in order to focus the time and resources on this more fully featured sequel. Also, a rabid fan base has contributed numerous ideas that make *Tribes* more accessible. Between the new graphics engine, the core gameplay, the community feedback and the improvement in 'net play, Tribes 2 will be a real force in the online action market.



The background story to this futuristic gang fight will be expanded in the sequel. The factions will have a greater graphical distinction to give each side more identity.

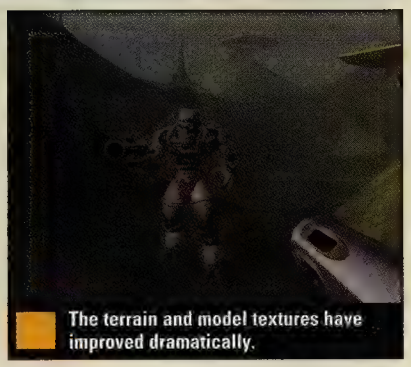
ragged hills of an alien battleground. He then effortlessly drags the twenty-foot ramp to a monstrous new size that rivals the mountains around it, thanks to the scaleable object sizing. Then he gets silly for a while, scaling other ramps and bits of organically-curved metallic buildings to create towering, cyclopean ski-jumps, half-pipes, and other Olympic monstrosities that look like something from a Hot Wheels set made for the gods.

In addition, all the soldier models have a radically higher poly-count, sporting independently moving heads and torsos (torsos that heave with breath — a nice touch). Vehicle physics have been overhauled too, making them more maneuverable over the varied terrain rolls, hills and valleys.

Tribes 2 will give devoted squad-based gamers real reason to keep their potentially crazed selves at home — namely a gorgeous, mesmerizing, soul-devouring world editor.

The Terraformed Jungle — Beautiful Worlds, Hideous Terrain

At least half of *Tribes 2's* coolness rating comes from its staggering world editor. You can do just about anything with it, and the results, while impressive, are by no means preordained to be good. Aside from daredevil ramps and jumps, you can use the built-in mission editor to randomly generate sprawling, infinite terrain maps. That's right, *infinite* — after a main battle zone a couple of clicks square, the "surrounding" terrain simply repeats in a tiled manner. The ground-types range from lush green plains to snow-capped peaks; from baked desert hardpack to large bodies of water; from fog-shrouded lowlands to staggering, spiky, ridiculous peaks with slopes like a tent peg. Five texture sets with dozens of individual items such as trees, and area-themed buildings make for countless combinations.



The terrain and model textures have improved dramatically.

Just to prove the point, I asked the *Tribes 2* team to show me just how icky and *wrong* a landscape they can whip up. Plopping in a fractally-generated landscape from the "Lush" worldset and going to work for perhaps three minutes — dragging moors into mountains and smashing Kilimanjaros into craters — Frohnmayer whips up what has to be the most unfriendly, ghastly, alien-looking yuck-scape I've ever seen. The world he created had outrageously thin and treacherous snow-capped peaks with impossibly steep grades, fog-shrouded lowlands (you can mess with weather effects, too, setting your battles amid violent storms where you can be hit by lightning), and unattractive brownish lakes under a bruised purple sky, grotesquely warmed by a snot-green sun. Good thing the game retains its flyer units and jump-jet packs, 'cause there ain't no way you're getting a wheeled vehicle through there.

The scalability of the structures can make things rather interesting, too. Click-drag a fortress up to the heights of the foothills, and you've got the makings of a "little people" mod, with *Tribes* soldiers having to use their jump-packs to attain the lowest ledge of what would otherwise be floor molding! Build a sprawling bunker and artificially "sink" it low into the ground, and you've got instant haunted-house corridors suffused with an

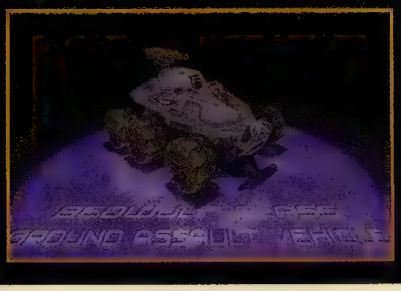
PLAY BY YOURSELF

Being an inexperienced player — a "NewBlood," as the rank has come to be known — in the original *Tribes* blew especially big chunks; even moreso than in other shooters, the learning curve was downright hostile, and the intimidation factor upon joining an actual "hot" battle-zone was considerable. With a clunky team control interface, team games all too easily devolved in to individual skirmishes with little coordination as newcomers slowly adjusted to the tactical thinking that was required. To address that issue, *Tribes 2* will offer ten single-player training missions (including two mini-campaigns comparable to those found in *Unreal Tournament*) in which green recruits can man their teams with AI combatants before establishing a beachhead in the brutal online reality of a Full Metal Furball.

TAXI!

Dynamix has been mighty protective of the specifics about new vehicle options. One confirmed addition is the promising (but as-yet-unnamed) armed scout vehicle designed for two-player operation. Like the original, one player gets to drive but this time the passenger gets his hands on the on-board gatling-style gun. A ground assault vehicle (a dune buggy with mounted gun) is the other vehicle confirmed thus far, with others likely to follow.





www.DailyRadar.com

eerie fog. Combine curved surfaces and you end up with rock faces with gigantic holes in them — geologic doughnuts like something you'd see in the Painted Desert or in a cartoon starring Wile E. Coyote.

Being the kind of guy that I am, it occurs to me that by using the game's editor to alter values such as gravity and weapon blast-radius effects, I could effectively create war zones where man-portable slug-throwers could send bullets for miles, or shoulder weapons whose shells impacted like tactical nukes, damaging everything in a quarter-click radius. I asked the *Tribes 2* team if this scenario were possible, and they just smiled and looked away. Yes indeedy-Bob — I know what I'll be doing the first two weeks after the *Tribes 2* release. I might even get around to playing the game sometime.



I know it's only a game, but just how *do* you go to the bathroom in that suit?

Lock and load and get online

In addition to modified team-multiplay standards like Capture the Flag, there is also a cycling offense/defense game structured not unlike football, and certainly offering more than a casual nod to the Assault mode of *Unreal Tournament*. First one team must meet offensive objectives such as capturing standards or destroying hardware while the opponents defend as best they can, and then the roles switch. Victory is not achieved merely by mass rushes or blitz tactics, but by each individual Tribe member fulfilling role-specific victory conditions. Finally, even less-glamorous support roles (such as field engineer) will give their players a sense of purpose, rather than running back and forth fixing things at the Supreme Commander's whim.

A "survival" mode allows one player to nab and maintain control of a flag while everybody and his gun-toting grandma has to hunt him down — a nasty proposition in a game-world infamous for snipers.

"We've rewritten everything. I guess that's what you'd call the first main difference."

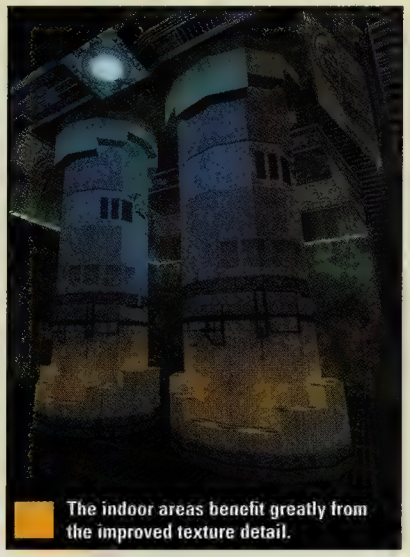
—MARK FROHNMAYER, *TRIBES 2* SOFTWARE ENGINEER

The star of *Tribes 2*'s new ordnance loadout is the man-portable missile launcher, whose weight and setup time take their toll, but whose long-range, strategic-weapon punch make it less like a copter-killer and more like a *building*-killer (mess with the range, blast power and radius settings for this weapon in the mission builder and *zing!* you've got an instant mini-nuke, which can radically alter team-based tactics for obvious reasons). At least two other new weapons will join the mix, with others being included if time permits.

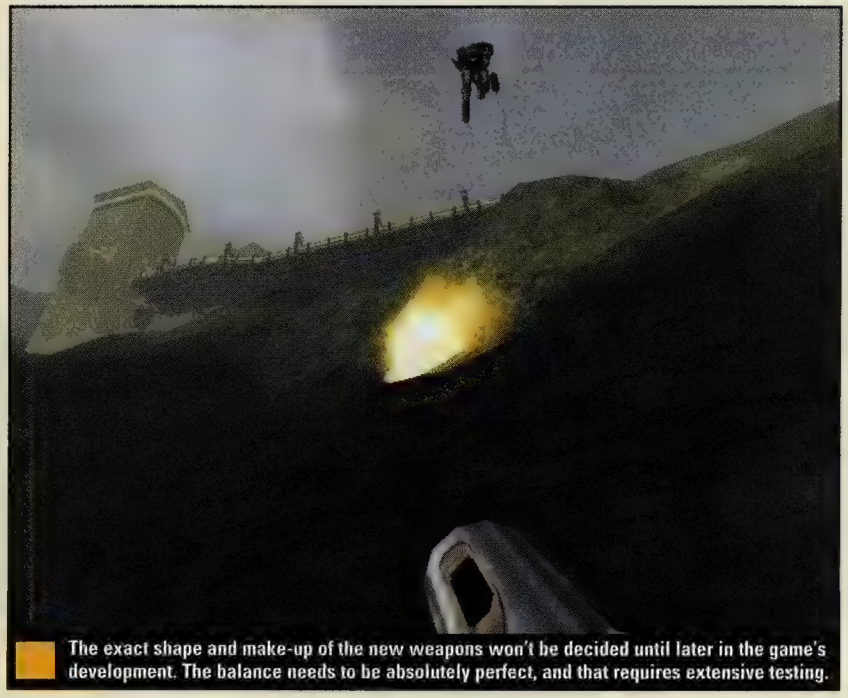
Details as to the aural background of all this comraderie-based carnage are officially unconfirmed, but Motley Crue are almost certain to be composing original tracks for the project.

Tribes 2 seems to be coming along as a sleek, buffed-out, major expansion of the core team-based action mechanic that the original pioneered. With increased control over the battlefield command, a complete overhaul of the graphics engine, and more carefully considered levels (with all the possibilities for user-created craziness), *Tribes 2* will emerge as the significantly more mature older brother of the wet-behind-the-ears, occasionally naïve, yet still entertaining original.

—Chris Hudak



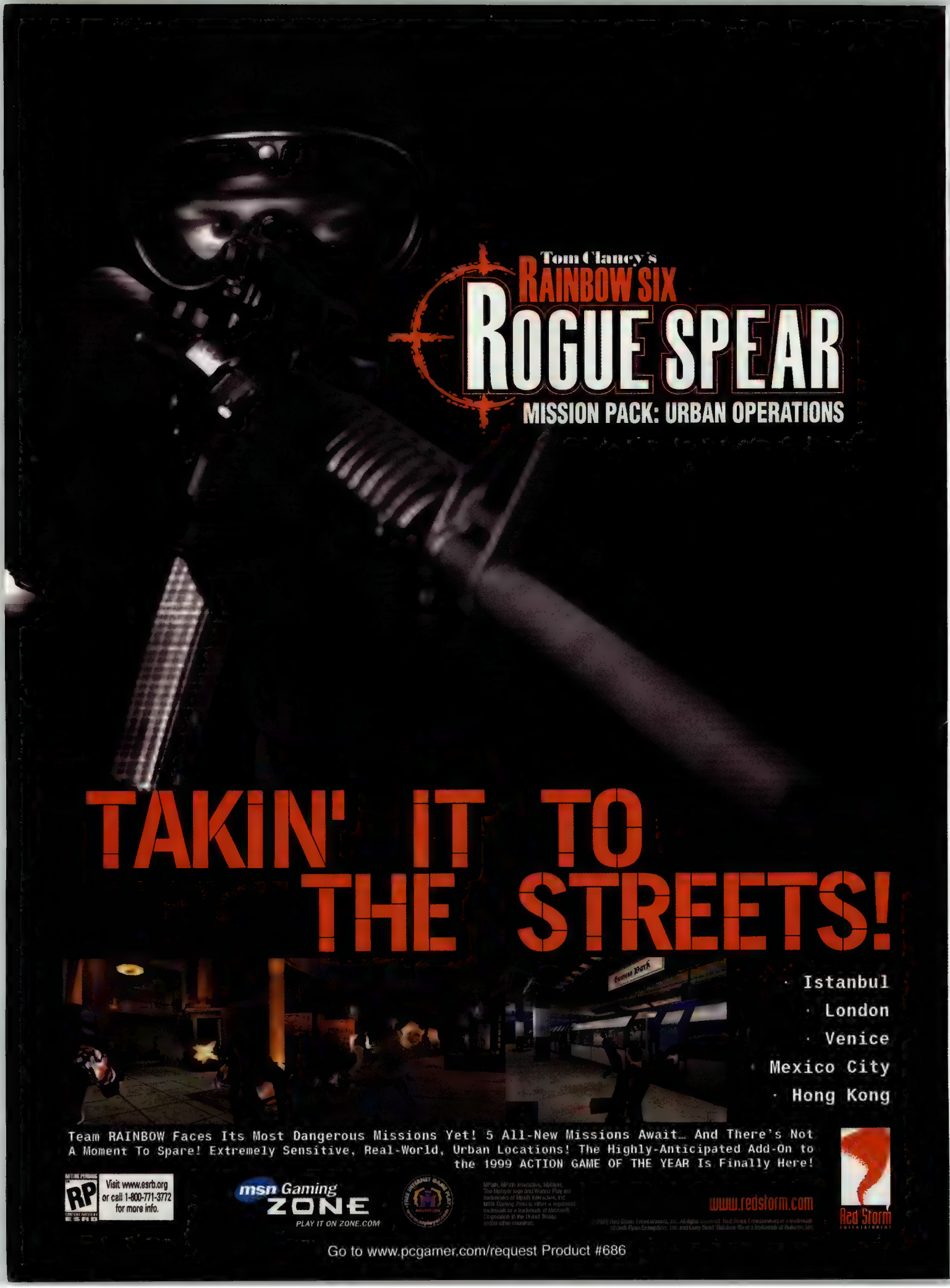
The indoor areas benefit greatly from the improved texture detail.



The exact shape and make-up of the new weapons won't be decided until later in the game's development. The balance needs to be absolutely perfect, and that requires extensive testing.

HAILING FREQUENCIES OPEN

The squad-based gaming thing is all about connection, and sometimes it's just a pain in the ass. Everybody's connected right? But many an otherwise fired-up game player has been turned away from or even intimidated by the wonder of squad-based gaming by the sheer hassle factor involved. *Tribes 2* aims to get around this with a single-click scheme that locates suitable games (defined by criteria such as number of players, world-sets, game-types, etc.), allows players to set up their own Tribes pages with templated ease, and offers instant access to new materials and add-ons (the design team resolutely refused to use the word "patches" in my presence)!



Go to www.pcgamer.com/request Product #686

Shogun: Total War

Mix the warfare and pageantry of Kurosawa's *Ran* with the combat of *Myth*

The lore of feudal Japan is so rich and popular that it's amazing no one has really explored the possibilities in a computer game. The closest anyone has come to giving the milieu its due is the Chinese historical strategy games in the Romance of the Seven Kingdoms series. Dreamtime Interactive and Creative Assembly have been hard at work to rectify this with *Shogun: Total War*, a heady brew of strategic empire management and close-in real-time tactical combat. The game is more than a year past its initial ship date, but the care and attention the developers are lavishing on this extremely complex game should pay off in spades.

Shogun casts you in the role of a warlord from one of eight clans striving to be Shogun in 16th Century Japan. Your monumental task is to build an army of thousands and unite the various provinces (there are 60 altogether) under your crown. *Shogun* works on two levels, allowing you to tend to affairs of state and plan battles on one, then zoom into a fully 3D tactical engine to fight those battles. The strategic level is played using a detailed map of Japan on which you build and train armies, place fortresses, order assassinations, and use taxes, investments, and trade to fill the coffers. Some warlords will become allies and others enemies, and all the while revolts challenge your authority. Religion even enters the mix; you gain different benefits in terms of structures and units depending upon whether you encourage your people to stay Buddhist or follow the Christian missionaries. Events based on historic fact unfold as the game progresses, changing the nature of alliances and the conflict as a whole.

It's certainly possible to play the game from different perspectives. "You can get the computer to calculate the battles and just concentrate on strategy, or just play a series of battles. However, because it's a continuous open ended campaign, to become Shogun you're going to want to fight the battles with the troops that you've built, paid for and trained," says Dreamtime marketing manager Jason Fitzgerald.



Landscapes look terrific, with plenty of terrain detail, good use of smoke and fog, and small animals bounding away as the troops pound their way through the wilderness.

Battles take place on a lushly detailed 3D map complete with thousands of warriors. Archers, samurai, cavalry, arquebusiers, warrior monks, musketeers, and other units and variants swarm across the rolling terrain. Custom tactical encounters can be created on a wide array of terrain maps, and some stand-alone historical battles are also included.

"You give orders to each unit leader and watch their progress," Fitzgerald says, "even asking them to commit harakiri if they don't live up to your high standards."

Icons let you know which unit is winning, losing, routing, charging, firing, moving, tired, exhausted, or fresh. Your tactical decisions with those units have to remain sound. "Asking twenty light archers to attack one hundred heavy cavalry will probably make so little sense to them that they will just desert your army," Fitzgerald says. "On the other hand, leading them wisely will improve their morale and fighting ability."

Many of these elements were in place when EA first started showing the game a year ago and it's a credit to the developers' dedication that they took the time to further tweak the design and rigorously balance and play test this complex title.

"Each individual samurai on the battlefield has his own artificial intelligence, so they will make decisions based on what you ask them to do."
— Jason Fitzgerald, marketing manager



Castle sieges promise to be one of the more interesting elements of combat.

The interface has been steadily improved and streamlined, too, with quick and easy access to order and formation commands and camera controls. Since feudal Japanese warfare is *terra incognita* for PC gaming, working out effective combat dynamics, terrain effects, formation and AI routines, and attack/defense ratings required some finesse.

Every element of the project has progressed during the delay. The graphics look fabulous, with detail touches such as higher-res sprites and more effective use of water reflections, smoke, dust, and fog. There are even smaller ambient elements such as birds that will scatter when spooked by approaching troops. An expert on the period was called in to add depth and realism to the setting, resulting in an elaborate re-creation of court intrigue, fighting techniques, and even the personalities of the period. It's been interesting to watch the game progress, and rare to see a publisher willing to take the time to get things right.

— T. Liam McDonald

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Real-time Strategy
DEVELOPER: Dreamtime
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts, (800) 245-4525, *www.ea.com*
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 80%
RELEASE DATE: Spring 2000

Comanche/Hokum

Hold on to your collectives — Empire raises the ante for helicopter sims

Despite their gruesomely incompetent showing in the Chechen war, the Russians are still capable of fielding world-class weapons. One such implement of destruction is the KA-52 Hokum, a next-generation attack helicopter designed to replace the venerable Hind and to contest the American RAH-66 Comanche. The Hokum is a twin-rotor, massively armed, flying tank, while the Comanche is an elegant high-tech rapier. Pit these two beasts against one another on a 21st century battlefield, and watch the sparks fly.

Enemy Engaged: Comanche versus Hokum is designed to be far more than an add-on pack for Empire's 1999 hit, *Apache/Havoc*. Kevin Bezant, who's heading up the project for Razorworks, says, "We've built on the strengths of the earlier game, but this one has even more action and is, I think, much more intensely immersive. Our intention is to provide a fanatically detailed simulation for the expert, and a terrific action-shooter for the novice."

For starters, the 3D engine has been greatly improved ("To take advantage of changes in Direct X," says Bezant); it now supports hardware transform-and-lighting. The game will run at resolutions up to 1600x1200, and the improvements will be most readily apparent in the resolution of terrain geometry and the detail of terrain textures.

"We've added many more 3D models, more helicopters, and new transport aircraft," says Bezant. The latter are rather cool additions, because they can drop crates and speed up the resupply aspect of the AI.

Indeed, the Coolness Factor is high, incorporating lots of creative details. For instance, since the Hokum's pilot and gunner fly side-by-side, a lot of work has gone into making these guys realistic. To this end the developers have incorporated an animated crew that react to stimuli — the pilot's limbs move in accordance with the control inputs — but they also keep themselves busy by scanning around, pressing buttons, etc. There are some other subtle but effective touches: the Hokum crew will lower their night goggles when they are in use and the Comanche's HIDSS (Helmet Integrated Display Sighting System) is actually projected on the lenses.



Saudi Arabia is one of the real-world war zones featured in *Comanche/Hokum*, along with Lebanon and Taiwan. The scenarios are so realistic, it's frightening.

"The player will have the complete freedom to explore every area of the city from buildings to rooftops."

—Eric Adams, producer

Missions and dynamic campaigns are set in three real-world threat zones: Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Taiwan (frighteningly plausible in light of the recent Chinese saber-rattling). Ground combat in general has undergone a major overhaul. Now, you will be able to see what the ground forces are up to in detail. "To tighten up all the ground action, we've redesigned the warzones to ensure that the opposing ground forces come into contact with each other much more frequently," says Bezant.

Despite the overall raves it received, *Apache/Havoc* came in for some criticism because it really pumped iron in the hardware department — you needed a brawny top-end system to get the full experience. That, too, has been addressed.

Says Bezant, "This sim does not have the fixed cockpit art of *Apache/Havoc* and it utilizes much more efficient data storage for the 3D models. The maps have also been resized and are generally more compact. What this means is that the memory footprint of the game is smaller than *Apache/Havoc*'s and therefore less memory paging is required. We've made the price of admission quite a bit more reasonable."

A lot of people thought *Apache/Havoc* was one of the best helicopter sims ever. Empire hopes to broaden the appeal still further for the sequel.

— William R. Trotter



Great care has been taken to make the crews look and act like real people.

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Simulation

DEVELOPER: Razorworks

PUBLISHER: Empire Interactive, (415) 439-4854, *www.empire-us.com*

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 80%

RELEASE DATE: Late spring, 2000

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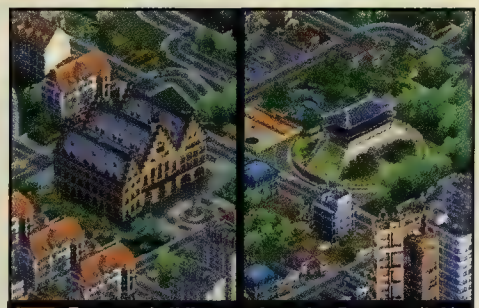
SimCity 3000 Unlimited

Maxis gives us a great reason to re-up for another term as Mayor

When the final sales figures for 1999 came rolling in, it was a surprise to see *SimCity 3000* only second in the list. It was a shoe-in for top place until *Roller-coaster Tycoon* took off. Part game, part software sandbox, the SimCity franchise has always pleased both the critics and the game-buying public. So it was no surprise when Maxis informed us that it was releasing an expanded version of the game, called *SimCity 3000 Unlimited* (hey, when something works this well...). This new entry will be a stand-alone product, although owners of the standard edition will be able to buy an upgrade version at a reduced price.

Added to the nearly 500 buildings found in the original game, *Unlimited* will include two new building sets based on European and Asian architecture. There will also be new landmark buildings (around 30 including the Brandenburg Gate), several new reward buildings, and a collection of some of the best user-created designs found on the Maxis SimCity homepage (*www.maxis.com*). In total, there will be around 300 new buildings. Four new tree types and four new terrain styles will also be at your disposal for further customizing your city.

And customization is the order of the day, thanks to the new terrain editor that lets you shape and sculpt your landmasses before starting to build your city, as well as an updated version of the Building Architect. With this improved tool, you'll be able to add props to your buildings and surrounding landscape, such as vehicles, trees, or anything you like (the game will include around 100 objects, but, by using an image editor, virtually anything can be created). Importing your creations into the game will also be much simpler; instead of having to create an entire building set, you just query any building in the game and choose to replace it. For those that don't have the skills of Frank Lloyd Wright, the program will include an Architect Assistant to help get you started.



Two new building sets featuring European (left) and Asian (right) architecture will be available.

For those that don't have the skills of Frank Lloyd Wright, the program will include an Architect Assistant to help get you started.

Another major addition to the game will be the scenario creator. *Unlimited* will ship with 15 Maxis-designed scenarios, but expect to see a proliferation of them online once gamers get their hands on this useful tool. To give you an idea of how it will work in the game, we asked Senior Producer Christine McGavran to explain the Unification of East and West Berlin, one of the scenarios found in the game:

"When you start the scenario, you will see Berlin as it existed right at the start of unification — the Berlin wall is still there, but partially torn down," says McGavran. "West Berlin is a modern, attractive city and East Berlin is a city with some serious problems, such as high pollution, antiquated buildings, and low land value. Your challenges include taking down the wall, connecting the transportation networks, and improving the quality of life in East Berlin. If you don't do this quickly, you may have to deal with some upset citizens!"

Other cool new touches include four new disasters (including the ever-popular plague of locusts!), holiday and seasonal events (Christmas decorations appearing around the city, Fourth of July celebrations, Thanksgiving Day parades, etc.), and a snapshot tool that will let you create a photo album of your cities' history.

Assuming the price is right (no word yet on exactly what the pricing structure will be), fans of the game should find enough new elements here that easily justify the upgrade. If you've never experienced the joy of building and managing your own city, here's the perfect opportunity to see what all the fuss is about.

— Rob Smolka



The new Building Architect tool is a big improvement over the website version.

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Strategy

DEVELOPER: Maxis

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts, (800) 245-4525, *www.ea.com*

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 90%

RELEASE DATE: May



A scenario that requires you to unite East and West Berlin is one of the many new challenges you'll face in *SimCity 3000 Unlimited*. You can also create your own scenarios.

Morrowind

Bethesda gears up to blow us away with the next in the Elder Scrolls series



A storm slows the progress of a player, his guide, and their mount. Weather is realistically modeled, effecting visibility and mobility during gameplay.

On the four years since Bethesda unleashed their monster RPG *Daggerfall*, the genre reinvented itself several times. *Daggerfall* and its predecessor, *The Elder Scrolls: Arena*, made their splash in a market hungry for depth of play and exploration, scooping up every award imaginable in the process. Online, ahem, massively multiplayer RPGs, mandatory hardware acceleration, the rebirth of the Might & Magic series, and the success of complex, top-down games like *Baldur's Gate* and *Fallout* have redefined a genre that barely had a pulse when *Daggerfall* hit. Finally Bethesda is starting to open up about its return to the world of The Elder Scrolls with *Morrowind*, and our early look shows a vast, gorgeous game, which promises almost infinite depth.

"Scope" has always been the hallmark of The Elder Scrolls games; they are big, complex roleplaying games where characters can be fine-tuned with a dazzling array of stats and skills. The gameplay is so open-ended that you can have a grand old time without ever following the main storyline. The world itself is simply immense, populated with countless characters and promising a new adventure around every corner. *Daggerfall*, in particular, felt like a game you could play without end.

"Scope" has always been the hallmark of The Elder Scrolls games; they are big, complex RPGs where characters can be fine-tuned.

That trend will clearly continue in *Morrowind*, which Bethesda promises will have the "most detailed virtual world ever created." Like its forebears, it will be an open-ended single-player game with detailed character creation. Character-through-action is being emphasized even more, with behavior shaping the development of your character and the story. Whether you're a hero, thief, mage, or any one of a number of other classes, the guilds you join, the quests you take, and the way you act will contribute both to your abilities and to the way NPCs relate to you. Join one guild, and another becomes your foe. Befriend a certain character, and find yourself targeted for assassination at the behest of another. In this way, both character and story evolve and branch independently for each gamer.

As the accompanying screen shots show, Bethesda is crafting a world that is uncommonly beautiful. Among the promised features are realistic textures, high polygon counts with a continuous level of polygon detail, real-time shadows, rendering out to the horizon, and skeletal animations. Lips and eyelids move dynamically, and character clothing and armor exist as objects in the game world that can be removed and placed on another person. The weather system alone is a huge leap, with meteorological events not only providing visual effects, but also affecting character animations, visibility, and movement. Because the interface is fully customizable, all, some, or none of the various menus can be placed anywhere on the screen and custom-sized. As you meet and speak with characters, they display a Disposition value in the dialog box, which helps track just how much this person likes or hates you. Subjects that have cropped up in dialog or journal entries will be available for NPC encounters, so you can ask different characters about almost any subject.

Morrowind is certainly still in its very early development stages, but these first glimpses and the proven record of the series already point to great things. Even with the torrent of RPGs that are on the way, gamers will surely find the time for a fantasy world of such immense richness and detail.

— T. Liam McDonald



As you talk to characters, you can bring up different subjects or try to use persuasion to make them like you more. Everything you do affects the story.

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: RPG

DEVELOPER: Bethesda Softworks

PUBLISHER: Bethesda Softworks, (800) 677-0700, *www.bethsoft.com*

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 30%

RELEASE DATE: Late 2001

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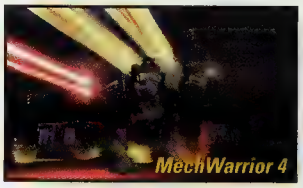


Gamesto

No muddy fields, free love, or drugs, but plenty of fine games

When more than 100 game journalists from around the world descend on Microsoft's games HQ, the bartenders and pool halls of Seattle prepare for a steep spike in business. The biggest surprise of this year's event was the head of the Microsoft games division, Ed Fries, introducing Relic Entertainment's design hot shot Alex Garden as the latest developer to join a stable that already includes Chris Roberts, Chris Taylor, and Bruce Shelley. In a move that evidently shocked Sierra, Relic has inked a deal for a new project to come out under the Microsoft banner. No details were released about Garden's new title, though it's promised to be "extremely ambitious."

Topping the bill of previously unseen titles was FASA's *MechWarrior 4*. A return to a more action-focused game mechanic (in other words, removing the need for keyboard overlays and complicated commands) was promised, alongside a further graphical overhaul. Six new Mech designs will be among the 20-odd units, with artificial intelligence promising to re-create more human-like actions. We'll be bringing you more soon.


MechWarrior 4


Midtown Madness 2

Despite designer Chris Roberts' presence, only a video trailer of his E3 Game of Show recipient *Freelancer* was shown. Still, the mix of stunning cinematic visuals and some in-game sequences hinted at the potential. With Roberts promising a universe of incredible possibilities (and subsequent balancing and design nightmares) it's probably fair not to expect this one until some time late next year. Sorry.

Among the rest of the games on show, flying adventure *Crimson Skies* looks absolutely amazing and plays just as well. *Midtown Madness 2* is still early, but the potential of driving like a maniac through the streets of San Francisco and London will hold up despite the lack of character (that gave *Driver* an edge in this market).

In his opening presentation, Fries outlined five principles that will guide Microsoft's game design philosophy: character, narrative, investment, choice, and emotion were the key elements (with accessibility omitted due to it being the focus of last year's speech). With all these elements in place, Fries' assertion that the PC will remain a relevant games platform is encouraging: "The console market is going to be rockier in the next few years [due to competition from systems such as Microsoft's own X-Box] than the PC, and so the PC will be a safe haven," he says. We'll have more detailed reports on some of these hot looking titles coming soon.

GAMING GADGETS

Aside from the games, Microsoft's controller contingency unveiled three new products. Most intriguing was the Strategic Commander, set to be priced at $59.95, which is essentially a slightly more advanced version of the Saitek GM2 device reviewed on page 119. Designed to sit at the left side of the keyboard, it features six easily identifiable top buttons, three thumb buttons acting as switches for the top buttons and also another thumb switch that in total provides 72 different, fully programmable key functions (with 32 game profiles shipping with the software).

The top part of the controller, well sculpted to fit comfortably in the palm of just about any hand, is detached from the lower base and can be swiveled easily to allow full camera control in true 3D real-time strategy games. While the functionality of the keys and their ability to be mapped to any keyboard function provides a wide range of uses, it's the hard-core macro commands (several build and movement instructions mapped to a single key press or event) that will make this product a must-have at the highest level of RTS gaming.


Strategic Commander

Also revealed was the second coming of the Sidewinder Force Feedback Joystick, sporting refined forces and a greater range of sensitivity. Despite a smaller footprint, stability will be improved now that the power supply is built into the base of the stick, and this should also allow for quicker responding and more impactful effects. A new button layout and an improved throttle control should make experiencing the more than 100 different effects (everything from pulling Gs in a jet fighter to the sensation of reeling in a particularly feisty fish) more immersive than ever.

With voice communication emerging as a more useful element of online gaming, Microsoft has entered the arena with the Game Voice. The headset and fully featured software isn't revolutionary (Roger Wilco has been doing many of the same things for a while) but the handset controller makes accessing the controls available through the software much easier. With set buttons, you can make simple clicks to control talking to everyone in your game room, just those on your team, or even individual people. It's that level of control that will make this product useful for team games and organized strategy gaming.

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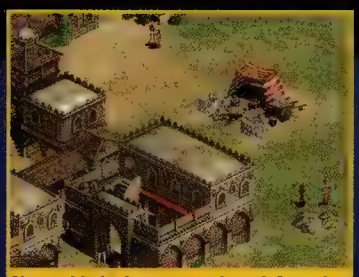
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AGE OF KINGS EXPANSION

Though designer Bruce Shelley was tight-lipped about the forthcoming expansion to the chart-topping real-time strategy hit, we managed to eke out a few details of what to expect. To be titled *Age of Conquerors*, the expansion will introduce five new conquering civilizations that weren't part of the original game (we suspect that there will be a couple of European entries such as the Spanish or Portuguese and French).

Four new campaigns (at least three of which based on historical characters) and a number of new game options are also promised, including maps shaped as actual countries, such as Italy, to add further historical flavor.

Certain specific units are also being tweaked to expand their uses. It will be possible to garrison battering rams to increase their movement speed and also their battering damage due to the increased force. We'll give you more news as we get it.



Nope, this isn't a screenshot of *Age of Conquerors*, but it's the next best thing — *Age of Kings*.



Brian Reynolds is Big and Huge

Former Firaxis game god starts new company

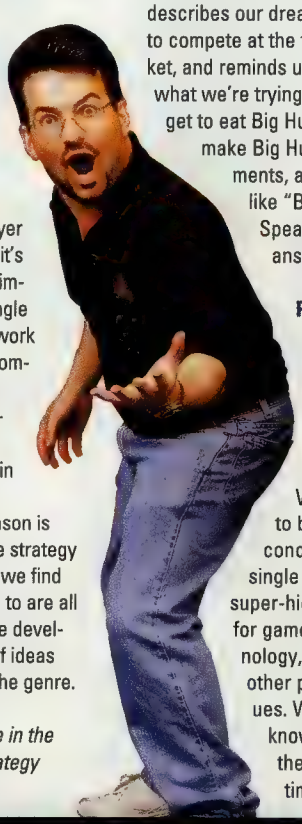
Last month we had a short interview with game god Brian Reynolds, one of the co-founders of Firaxis, about his departure from that company. Reynolds didn't say much about his future plans other than that he was excited about them. Well, looks like he has good reason to be excited — he's started up a new game company called Big Huge Games.

Reynolds won't be alone in this endeavor either; he'll have a slew of design veterans with him including Tim Train, producer of *Alpha Centauri*, David Inscore, who was previously the lead artist for Sid Meier's new *Dinosaurs!* game, and Jason Coleman, a senior programmer, also from Firaxis.

Big Huge Games will focus on next generation, real-time strategy games. The goal is to release only cutting-edge products in a genre that could use some innovation. Can Brian Reynolds and his A-team get it done? We managed to get a hold of Reynolds again for another interview. Here's what he had to say about the future of Big Huge Games:

PCG: *First off, can you give us any sort of hint as to what you're currently working on?*
REYNOLDS: Well we've only been in business for two weeks, so things are at a pretty early stage of development — we're clearly not at a point to announce or show a particular product. But we're very excited. We definitely plan to work on strategy games, and the ideas we're most interested in include a significant real-time component, though not all are necessarily what you'd call "traditional" real-time strategy games.

PCG: *Why did you make the decision to focus on real-time strategy as opposed to other genres?*
REYNOLDS: Two main reasons: one practical and one emotional. On the practical side, real-time is much more suitable for Internet play, particularly in that (at least for the topics and scale of the games we like to work on) real-time makes possible the "one hour game" experience which is critical in the multiplayer world. We don't think it's enough any more to simply concentrate on single player, nor to merely work on multiplayer — to compete at the top of the games market in coming years we'll need compelling gameplay in both categories. The second, emotional reason is that we're all real-time strategy addicts — the games we find ourselves most drawn to are all real-time, and as game developers, we have a lot of ideas we want to try out in the genre.



PCG: *What do you see in the future of real-time strategy games? What kind of changes should we expect to see?*
REYNOLDS: This is one area where we'd prefer to demonstrate rather than discuss!

PCG: *Where did the name, "Big Huge Games" come from?*
REYNOLDS: Dave Inscore gets the credit for thinking of it. We like it because it has a joke quality that's so obviously over the top it shows we don't take ourselves too seriously. And yet, in its own way, it describes our dream to continue to compete at the top of the market, and reminds us to stay true to what we're trying to do. Also we get to eat Big Huge lunches, make Big Huge announcements, and say things like "Big-Huge-Brian-Speaking" when we answer the phone!

PCG: *How many products do you currently have in development?*
REYNOLDS: We're going to begin by concentrating on a single product with super-high standards for game design, technology, artwork, and other production values. We'll let you know more about the specifics as time goes on.

PC GAMER RECOMMENDS

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THE PCG NEWS TICKER

Okay all you *Unreal Tournament* fans — if you haven't done so already, go to *http://unreal.epicgames.com* and grab the free bonus pack. This official add-on pack gives you more skins, more levels, and a new feature known as *Relics* that gives you different power-ups. It's well worth the download.

Three people have left Blizzard Entertainment to form their own company. Michael O'Brien, the company director; Pat Wyatt, the vice president of research and development; and Jeff Strain, a lead programmer, have formed Triforge, a new games design studio. Their departure is not expected to cause any delays for Blizzard games.

Electronic Arts has gotten its hands on DreamWorks Interactive, the company that developed *Medal of Honor*, a first-person shooter for the PlayStation. No word yet on exactly how this will affect PC gamers, but hopefully we'll be seeing a PC version of this fine first-person shooter.

Activision has made a deal with DC Comics to bring out a comic book based on *Voyager: Elite Force*, the new first-person shooter from Raven Software. The comic will be done by Wildstorm Comics artists Jeff Moi and W.C. Carani, and should hit the newsstands sometime before the game is released.

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The Winner's Circle

In our February issue, we held a *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* contest. We printed 15 *PC Gamer*-created questions and asked our readers to send in the correct answers. Our plan was to randomly pick ten winners that got all of the questions right and give them a copy of the game and a *PC Gamer* sweatshirt.

Sounds simple, right? Well, it wasn't. It seems that we made the questions a little too hard as only four people managed to answer all ten questions correctly. We had to pick the rest of our winners from a group that got the $500,000 question wrong. As a result, we decided to give a bonus to those who got all the questions right in the form of a copy of *Age of Empires II*. Here are the winners divided by how many questions they answered correctly:



Regis would be very disappointed if he knew the final outcome of our *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* contest.

All Correct:
Bill Cassinelli, Saro Chakarian, Ed Halter, Michael B. Agee, Jr.

Missed the $500,000 Question:
David Polus, Paul J. Schoenke, Brian Ouellette, JDell Cordova, Weichung Ooi, Radu C. Nica

Here are the answers to the *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* Contest questions:

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$200 — C) Sid Meier
$300 — C) Protoss
$500 — B) Tom Watson
$1,000 — C) 1997
$2,000 — A) Pierre
$4,000 — B) Norrath
$8,000 — C) Katana
$16,000 — A) Rabbit
$32,000 — B) S3's ViRGE
$64,000 — C) Earl Weaver Baseball
$125,000 — D) Day of the Dead
$250,000 — A) IBM PCjr
$500,000 — B) Bioforge
$1,000,000 — B) Atilla

Other Winners...

Our other contest that just ended had six lucky winners receiving a copy of *Half-Life: Opposing Force* and a matching T-shirt. Congratulations to all our prize winners: Claude Felizardo, Kirk Pollard, David Vanlaningham, David Holtgrewe, Jeff Hublit, and Jack LeClair.

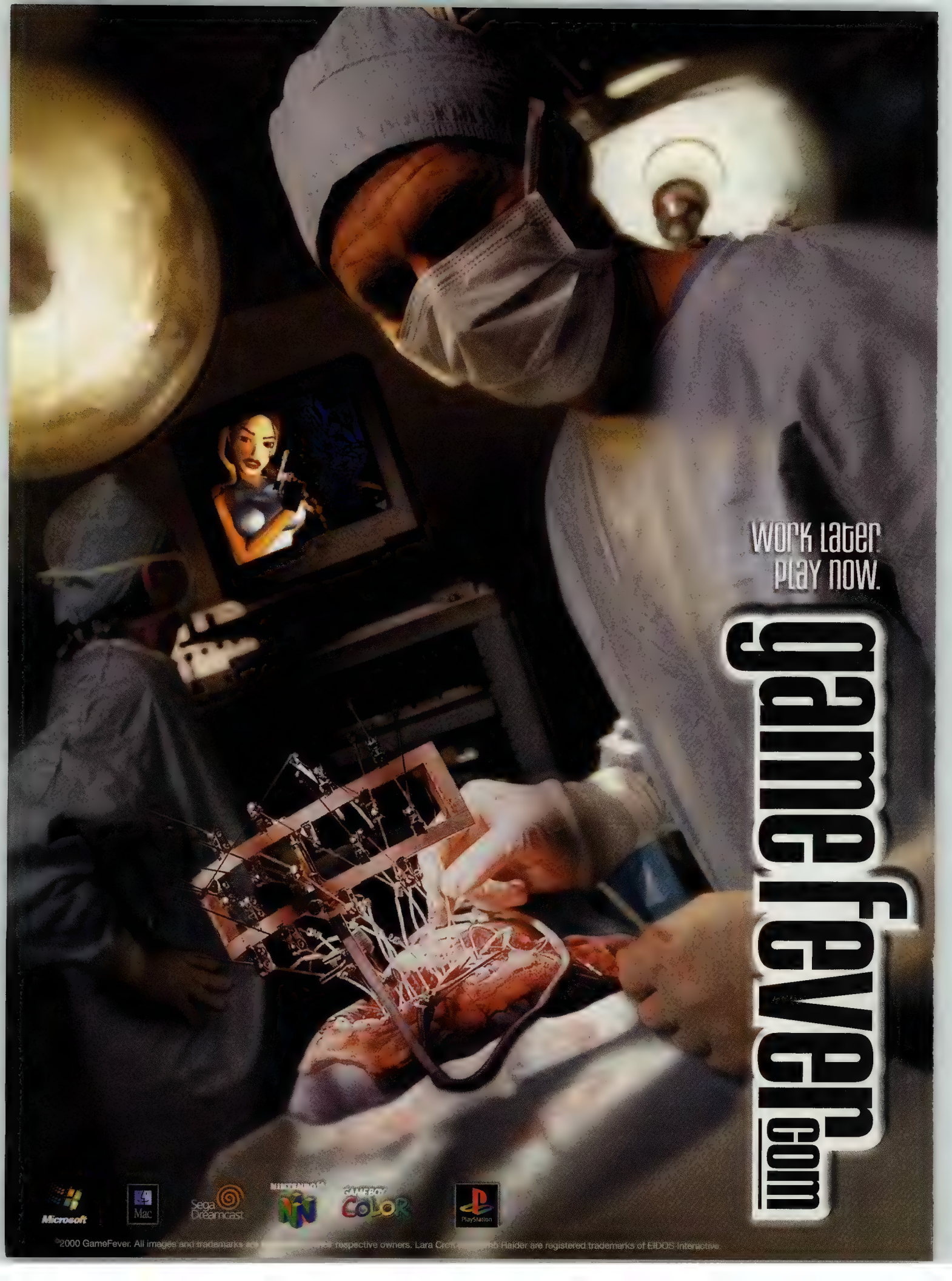
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THE PCG RELEASE METER

See anything you like?

Of course you do. And once again, we bring you a list of what to expect in the stores within the next couple of months. Remember, release dates are notoriously temperamental, so don't take these dates as the gospel truth

Thanks to Rich LaPorte and his Gone Gold crew for this list. Check out Gone Gold (*www.gonegold.com*), to get the most up-to-date news on when games hit the store shelves. Send news of release dates to *laporte@gonegold.com*









TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE	PROGNOSIS
Allegiance	Microsoft	04/01/00	They pledge
[illegible]	Bethesda	04/01/00	Should be
Tzar: Burden of the Crown	Talonsoft	04/01/00	Looking good
Chess 2000	Interplay	04/04/00	Checkmate
Triple Play 2001	EA Sports	04/04/00	Earlier
Traitor's Gate	DreamCatcher	04/05/00	Give or take a day or two
Emergency Rescue Firefighters	GT	04/05/00	Good to go
Caesar's Palace 2000	Interplay	04/10/00	Bet on it
Colin McRae Rally	Codemasters	04/12/00	Right on time
Imperium Galactica 2	GT	04/12/00	Should take off
Shadow Watch	Red Storm	04/12/00	It's gold already
Micro Maniacs	Codemasters	04/14/00	Good possibility
Rainbow Six: Urban Operations	Red Storm	04/14/00	Affirmative
Ultima Online: Renaissance	Origin	04/18/00	Need more time
Tachyon	NovaLogic	04/18/00	Yes
Dukes of Hazzard	South Peak	04/19/00	Yee haw!
Metal Fatigue	Psygnosis	04/19/00	Will be close
EverQuest: Ruins of Kunark	Verant	04/20/00	Next month
Insane	Codemasters	04/21/00	Sure thing
Skip Barber Racing	Bethesda	04/26/00	Green light
FLY! 2000	G.O.D.	04/27/00	Takes off









TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE	PROGNOSIS
Reach for the Stars	Mindscape	04/29/00	Stars say yes
Starlancer	Microsoft	04/29/00	Next month
B-17 Flying Fortress II	MicroProse	05/02/00	We're hoping
Wall Street Tycoon	Ubisoft	05/02/00	We buy it
Europe in Flames	Talonsoft	05/02/00	Get your fiddle
Werewolf: The Apocalypse	ASC Games	05/03/00	Misses this moon
Hidden and Dangerous Gold	Talonsoft	05/03/00	Should make it
Shogun: Total War	EA	05/04/00	Be ready warrior
Martian Gothic	Talonsoft	05/04/00	Yes
Earth 2150	Mindscape	05/05/00	We agree
Icewind Dale	Interplay	05/10/00	Later than this
Millionaire 2	Disney	05/10/00	Is this your final date?
Motocross Madness 2	Microsoft	05/12/00	Revved up and ready
PGA Golf 2000	Sierra	05/15/00	Bring your clubs
Evolva	Interplay	05/15/00	It's possible
Star Trek: Conquest Online	Activision	05/17/00	So they say
Soulbringer	Interplay	05/18/00	About now
Warlords: Battlecry	Mindscape	05/19/00	Shaping up
SimCity 3000 Unlimited	Maxis	05/24/00	About this time
IHRA Drag Racing	Bethesda	05/25/00	Crosses finish line
Vampire: The Masquerade	Activision	05/30/00	Fingers crossed



Ahead, Worf Factor One

A special chat with everyone's favorite Klingon, Michael Dorn

We've got a special treat for all of you Trekkers out there. Our subject this month is one of the more popular characters ever to appear in the Star Trek universe: Michael Dorn who plays Worf, *the* Klingon among Klingons. We were able to catch up with this very busy and talented actor to ask him a few questions about his upcoming projects. Here's what he told us:



"Who are you calling walnut head?"

PCG: *Tell us about life after* Star Trek: The Next Generation. *What have you been doing to keep yourself busy?*
DORN: I followed up with four years on *DS9*, and since then I've broken into the independent film market with hopes to act and direct. Secondly, I've been flying.

PCG: *How do you think the production values for a game differs from that of a television series?*
DORN: With the obvious exclusion of live actors, the values are very close. Plus, with the game, you get a certain amount of freedom.

PCG: *Which do you enjoy doing more: games or television/movies?*
DORN: I love flight sim games, but I love watching television and acting in movies.

PCG: *What are your current favorites games?*
DORN: *Sabre Ace* and *MiG Alley*.

PCG: *Do you ever get tired of being Worf?*
DORN: No. (*Succinct, ain't he? — Ed.*)

PCG: *What plans do you have for the future?*
DORN: Direct, act, fly, be happy...



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THE TOP-SELLING GAMES: NOW AND THEN

THE TOP SELLERS TODAY...

NO.	GAME	PUBLISHER	PCG RATING
1.	*The Sims*	Electronic Arts	96%
2.	*Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*	Disney	78%
3.	*RollerCoaster Tycoon*	Hasbro Interactive	89%
4.	*Age of Empires II: Age of Kings*	Microsoft	94%
5.	*Nox*	Electronic Arts	89%
6.	*Roller Coaster Tycoon: Corkscrew Follies*	Hasbro Interactive	N/A
7.	*Quake III Arena*	Activision	80%
8.	*StarCraft*	Blizzard	92%
9.	*Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Gold Edition*	Red Storm	93%
10.	*SimCity 3000*	Electronic Arts	89%

...AND THIS TIME FIVE YEARS AGO

NO.	GAME	PUBLISHER	PCG RATING
1.	*Heretic Shareware*	GT Interactive	N/A
2.	*D!Zone Collector's Edition*	GT Interactive	N/A
3.	*Myst*	Mattel Interactive	95%
4.	*Doom II (Boxed)*	GT Interactive	90%
5.	*Doom Shareware*	id Software	N/A
6.	*Doom II (Direct)*	id Software	90%
7.	*NASCAR Racing*	Havas	94%
8.	*Wing Commander III: Heart of the Tiger*	Electronic Arts	96%
9.	*MS Flight Simulator*	Microsoft	N/A
10.	*Star Wars: X-Wing Collector's CD*	LucasArts	N/A

THE PCG NEWS TICKER

Zombie Studios, the company behind *Spec Ops*, has been purchased by Advanced Interactive Systems. AIS is a company that specializes in creating video-based simulators for SWAT teams. Hopefully, the combination of Zombie's game design and AIS' knowledge will result in some impressive games.

In a surprising move, NVIDIA and S3 have signed a seven-year, mutual, broad, cross-license agreement. This move dismisses their patent infringement suits against each other. So does this mean that we'll see GeForce cards from S3? Only time will tell. Watch the Hard Stuff section in the coming months for more information.

A new chapter in the *Homeworld* saga is on the way. Dubbed, *Homeworld: Cataclysm*, the game will be a stand-alone title that features 17 new missions, new ships, new research, better multiplayer, and more. The game will introduce a new threat in the form of a techno-organic entity called The Beast.

Activision has signed a deal with the entertainment magazine television show, *Entertainment Tonight*. It will be bringing out games based on the show, the first one due to come out later this year. Word has it that the game will be an interactive version. Yeah...we have no idea what to expect either.

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NEW WORLD COMPUTING

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Next Month

Ultima Online 2 Massively multiplayer roleplaying enters its second generation as we're allowed inside Origin HQ to get the world exclusive scoop on the cataclysm set to hit Britannia.

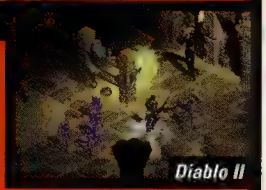
State of the PC Union We show you the future through games and developers who will keep the PC dominant against the threat of the new console generation.

Ultimate Gaming Preview So many games coming up. What's interesting you? We show you what to get excited about in our annual games bonanza.

PC Gamer **May 2000 will be on sale May 16 at all reputable outlets, by which time Rob and Joe will have erased all memory of Gary and Dean!** ***(Dream on, buster! — Dean)***

WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

It's baaaaaaaaaaaaaa-ack!



Diablo II

Well, that didn't last long. *Diablo II* is back — and with a vengeance. Apparently, the hack and slash fans out there couldn't stand being one-upped by *Tribes 2*. Votes for *Diablo II* came flooding in at an unprecedented rate.

This month's winner is Patrick Landy, who, like everyone else, can't wait for *Diablo II*. Your prize is on the way!

1.	*Diablo II*	20%
2.	*Team Fortress 2*	13%
3.	*WarCraft III*	10%
4.	*Tribes 2*	6%
5.	*Halo*	6%
6.	*Thief II: The Metal Age*	5%
7.	*Duke Nukem Forever*	5%
8.	*Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn*	4%
9.	*Vampire: The Masquerade — Redemption*	3%
10.	*Black & White*	2%

We're going to try something a little different this month. Instead of the usual "Waiting is the Hardest Part," we're going to ask a new question. Don't worry, "Waiting is the Hardest Part" won't be going away, we just want to mix things up a bit. So for next month, send in an E-mail to *eyewitness@pcgamer.com* with the subject heading, "Enough Already!" and let us know what highly anticipated game you're the *least* interested in.

Of course, we'll still randomly pick one lucky person and give him or her a free game from our stash of gaming goodness. All entries must be received by the 30th of each month to be eligible for that month's prize. The winner will be notified by E-mail and get his or her name printed in our fine little publication. For additional rules, see below.

PC GAMER *GIVE-AWAY CONTEST RULES*

No purchase is necessary, and only one entry per household, per month, will be counted. Anyone can vote, but only U.S. residents are eligible to win prizes, and the offer is void in FL, RI, Puerto Rico, and where prohibited by law. Your chances of winning depend on the number of entries we receive.

THE PCG PLAYLIST

Who plays the hardest?

It's been an interesting month here in the *PC Gamer* offices. Gary and Dean? Gone. Rob and Joe? Trying to fill their shoes. It's a time of change. Jeremy, our resident *Quake* fanatic was seen playing *Unreal Tournament* and Li, our *Unreal Tournament* junkie was caught looking for a copy of *Quake III: Arena*. What's next?



ROB My first month at *PC Gamer* was spent in epic sessions of Word and Lotus Organizer. Of course, *Quake III Arena* remains on my hard drive, but my biggest guilty pleasure is guiding my soccer team, Sheffield United, to mid-table mediocrity in Eidos' UK-released *Championship Manager 99/00*.



LISA I'm still hopelessly addicted to *The Sims*. Now that my husband is the Mayor and I'm a major movie star, I'm working on my daughter, Emma. She's definitely an overachiever; she's getting straight As in school and has lots of friends. I just wish I could stop her from making a mess in the bathroom!



DAN Things I am playing this month: *Teen Digital Diva II*; *N'Sync Puzzles in Motion*; *Spin the Bottle*; *Russian Roulette* with three chambers loaded; with fire; well with others. I am also playing "Express My Disgust at the Jackal for his Internet Money Truck-Hopping Treachery."



SMOKE You're probably tired of hearing me say this, but it's been another month of *High Heat* madness for me. The latest version, *Sammy Sosa High Heat Baseball 2001*, is nearly everything I've ever wanted in a baseball game. If they put a financial model in next year, I may never leave my office chair.



LI After seeing Jeremy, our die-hard *Quake* fan, give *Unreal Tournament* a chance, I decided to load up *Quake III: Arena* and give it a whirl. By the end of the day, Jeremy admitted that the Redeemer was "pretty fun" and I admitted that I still liked *Unreal Tournament* better than *Quake III: Arena*. Score one for *UT*!



JEREMY Just yesterday, a bored Jay called upon my *Quake* skills to defeat the end boss of *Unreal Tournament*. Sensing I could profit from the deal, I asked if Jay might do the lunch run, if I managed to win. An hour later we ate like kings, thanks to a Flak Cannon and a gopher named the Jackal.



JOE After depleting my life savings getting out to the Bay area, I've been tied to a chair and placed in front of an aging Mac, forced to design page after page of the magazine. Despite how poorly I've been treated, it sure beats the hell out of my last job — working for the children's magazine, *Highlights*.



JAY Instead of my usual spewing of hatred this month, I'd like to take the time to thank all the people I've worked with: Dean and Lisa, The Dans, The Robs, Young Jeremy, Li, Billy, Wolf, Todd, Aaron, Joe, and Matt. Oh yeah, and I guess Vederman...the bastard! And to you, the readers, I say: "Sayonara, suckers!"



GREG Every day that *Diablo II* doesn't ship is another thorn in my side, but playing *NOX* has eased my pain a bit. The single-player game is a lot of fun, and the multiplayer is fast paced and engaging. Now, if I could only find someone to play it with... (*It's not the game...it's Vederman who we avoid — Ed.*)

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Games require ingenuity,
patience and concentration.
Choosing them shouldn't.

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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DIABLO II™

Vengeance Was Only The Beginning

Game design is easy, right?

With all the entries we've received, you'd think any fool could do the job. Here's your chance to prove to the world that you've got what it takes...

The competition is heating up. That special internship at ION Storm, the opportunity to rub shoulders with industry legends like John Romero and Tom Hall (or should that be Stevie "Kill-Creek" Case?) is staring you in the face. We're at the halfway stage of this six month contest, so time is running short to see your name in lights. Get working.

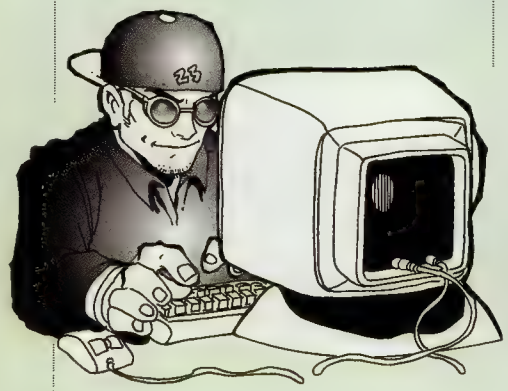
ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAN FRAGA

THIS MONTH'S CELEBRITY JUDGE:



Rob Pardo

[illegible]



Noir.net

by Andrew Baldwin-Merriweather

In this RPG, you play a freelance information hacker in the (not so distant) future. There are two main modes of play. The first is a "real world" where you must make and maintain contacts and business connections, get jobs, buy equipment, and avoid your enemies. It would be first-person, 3D, and realistic. The second mode is inside the 'net while you are jacked in. You navigate cyberspace, hack into protected systems to get information to sell on your own or that you were commissioned to get by a rival company. Cyberspace would be abstract with no physical laws. The overall tone of the game would be edgy and paranoid — betrayals and allegiance switching would be par for the course.

You can customize your character: either someone suited to get into a corporation physically (by gunfire or by stealth) or someone with much greater hacking skills who could get in from outside the company's system, but who wouldn't be nearly so physical.

To keep the edgy feeling you could save at any point and pick up a session where you left off the last time you played but you would not be able to go back to a previous point in the game. The past is the past, and unchangeable. Also, if your character is killed, then you are dead. That's it. No loading the last saved game.

To keep the game fresh, there would need to be a random generator for single-player missions and a mission builder. Also a multiplayer idea might be: "I set up a secure system, you try to break in, I try to stop you (or get into your system and shut you down)".

ROB SAYS: *The concept of game modes is a dangerous one. Anytime a player must learn the user interface two different times, you run the risk of alienating them. Try to keep the user interface consistent between the two modes in the game. The step I would take with this concept is to lay out a mission on paper. Come up with a single fun mission; don't get bogged down in features until you know how your game is going to play.*

Gangster

by Francesco Vallania

My game is set in the mid-thirties USA. It's an action RPG like *System Shock* but you can choose your job (Gangster, Private Eye, or FBI agent), and your choices during the game could modify your attitude. Your attitude will be determined during a particular kind of interactive "character creation and training" session set in a school. You play as a child, and you interact with the entire environment (example: if you are in front of an animal you will be able to feed him, hit him, or leave him alone). Then the computer, represented by a teacher, will tell you what job you're best suited for.

After some missions (a bank robbery or an investigation) the story will follow a common line despite your career. You'll control the character in first-person; you'll use your hands to take weapons and other things, but you must have one hand free to use objects and open doors. You can sneak, shoot, improve the abilities that you normally use and you can handle different situations in different ways (a gangster can't enter every building but a policeman can, so you've got to find another way, and a policeman can't buy weapons everywhere).

ROB SAYS: *In an RPG game, one the most important aspects is the story. By allowing the player to choose such diametrically opposed professions like FBI Agent or Gangster, you will need a very flexible story and level design. Don't be afraid to step back from your goals if it hurts the game. There is nothing wrong with a game that is more linear and does not allow you to play as the good guy and bad guy in the same game.*

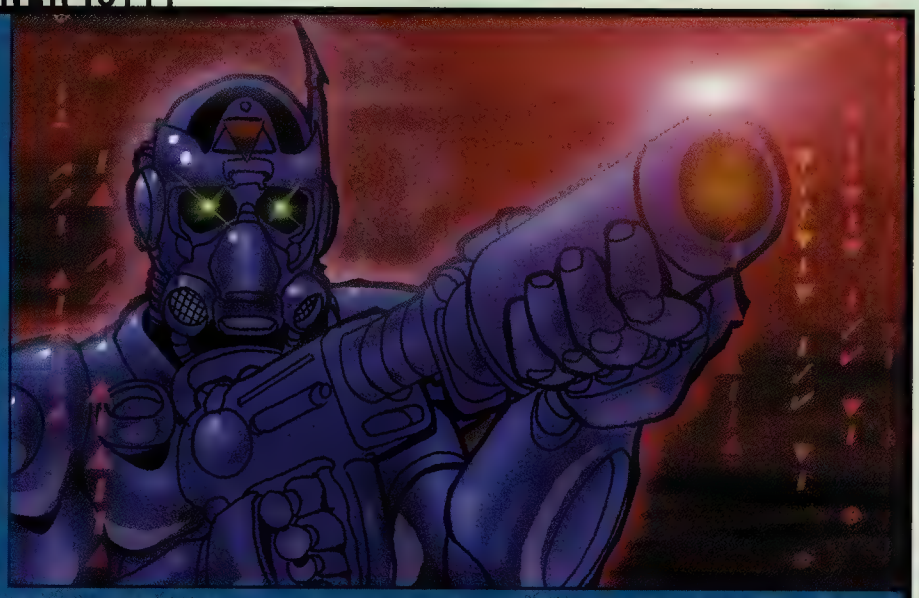


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THIS MONTH'S WINNER IS...

Janus

by Stephen Cutliffe



It is the 22nd century, an era of relative peace and stability following the end of World War Three. Assassination has become the favored tool of corporate and international conflict. You are Mitch Kane, codename Janus — assassin, saboteur, diplomat. You have been chosen by Arena, an international bio-technology corporation to infiltrate an experimental "City-Sphere" called Nova City. Your primary goal is to sabotage city's infrastructure and assassinate the "Mayor" of Nova City, a self-aware bio-computer. Your mission occurs during a conference of the leaders of the world's 12 most powerful countries. You have been given the secondary task of interacting with (not necessarily assassinating!) some or all of these leaders in order to further Arena's hidden political agenda. Whether you do this depends on your choices.

Some of the key features would be: the game would combine roleplaying elements with intense first-person action; there would be a non-linear environment — you could go anywhere and do anything; the storyline would change depending on your actions; and interaction with NPCs would further the plot (tip the musician, give the little girl a sucker, and don't shoot the guy in the wheelchair!); weapons won't always be the best way to deal with a sticky situation (talk isn't cheap)...

ROB SAYS: *Sounds like a game in the same vein as* Half-Life, *which is a great example to follow. Make sure to focus on the core elements of your game. For example, if it is first-person action, then make sure this area is solid and fun first, and add in interactive story elements second. Be careful with too many non-linear elements. Freedom is great, but if a player doesn't know what to do next to complete the game, they will become frustrated and stop playing.*

Heart Attack

By Jessy Khera

You are stranded on an island, which is deserted except for the members of the band "Heart", who are roaming wild. Your task: gun them down before they kill you. You are armed with an increasingly varied and powerful arsenal of projectile and trap-based weapons, while the band members will use guitar licks and lethal sprays of hair coloring to defeat you. The game will be in full 3D, of course.

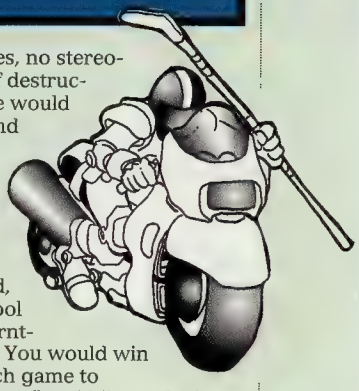


ROB SAYS: *The synopsis explains the setting for the game, but few of the mechanics. Some questions you need to answer are: What viewpoint is the game played in? Is this game an action game or adventure/puzzle game? Can I play this game in single player and multiplayer? What's your problem with Heart, anyway?*

Puck Punk

by Jason Lumper

My idea is for a hockey game on motorcycles. The motorcycles would be very cyber-punk themed, elongated with bright colors and strange company endorsements. The games would be deadly; a high sticking would usually result in decapitation. Each bike would have different capabilities; your defender bikes would have more offensive weapons, while the offensive bikes would have more defensive weapons. Here's an example: snot droppings (a form of oil slick) could be used for the starting offensive players and a sort of blunt rocket that shoots out a punching glove could be used by the defenders to knock the other players off their bikes. There would be no guns, no missiles, no stereotypical forms of destruction. Also, there would be a "versus" and regular play games. The regular play game would have a large variation of tracks: junkyard, graveyard, school playground, burnt-out church, etc. You would win money after each game to upgrade "weapons" and bikes, which would give you an edge in future games.



ROB SAYS: *Sounds like* Autoduel *meets* NHL Hockey. *Most games of this nature tend to be fun for the novelty of the concept but rarely have longevity. To ensure a long lasting, playable game, you will need to concentrate on making the game balanced and simple for new players, but still complex enough for people to come back for more. Most sports take decades to perfect before they become popular, so don't underestimate the difficulty of this task.* PCG

HOW TO ENTER

Describe your game idea in no more than 200 words, along the lines of the entries featured on these pages. Try not to get bogged down in specific details — your space is limited, and we're just looking for a general overview of the concept and central design. The judges will be looking for originality, the potential for a playable game and that all-elusive "coolness" factor. You may provide art, either computer-generated or sketches/drawings, to help flesh out your ideas for us (and illustrate these pages!).

We'd prefer to receive entries via E-mail, so we've set up a special address for this contest: *design@pcgamer.com*. Send your designs along with any attached artwork. If you'd prefer to use snail-mail, the address is PC GAMER DESIGN CONTEST, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005. We cannot return entries, so please do not send original artwork. Your entries will be edited for clarity and/or length.

HOW TO WIN THAT JOB AT ION STORM

Okay, here's how it works. We'll be running this feature every month for six months. Each month, a different renowned game designer will be on hand to evaluate the best of the game design ideas we receive, and select a winner. At the end of the six months, the winners will be re-evaluated by all the judges and an overall winner will be chosen. That lucky winner will get to spend a week at ION Storm's offices, testing the company's latest games in development. Travel to and from Dallas and hotel accommodations there will be picked up by ION Storm, but the rest is up to you. So, what are you waiting for? Get designing!

LEGAL STUFF — READ IT!

By submitting your game design idea to *PC Gamer*, you acknowledge that your design will become public domain — which basically means anyone can read it, take inspiration from it and use it for their own purposes. You also acknowledge that neither *PC Gamer* nor any of the companies affiliated with this contest has or will have any liability for the use of ideas submitted and/or published.



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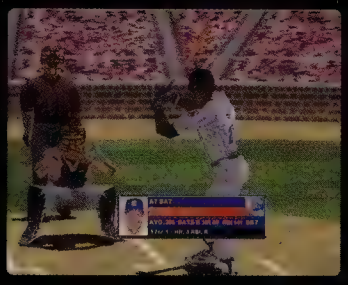
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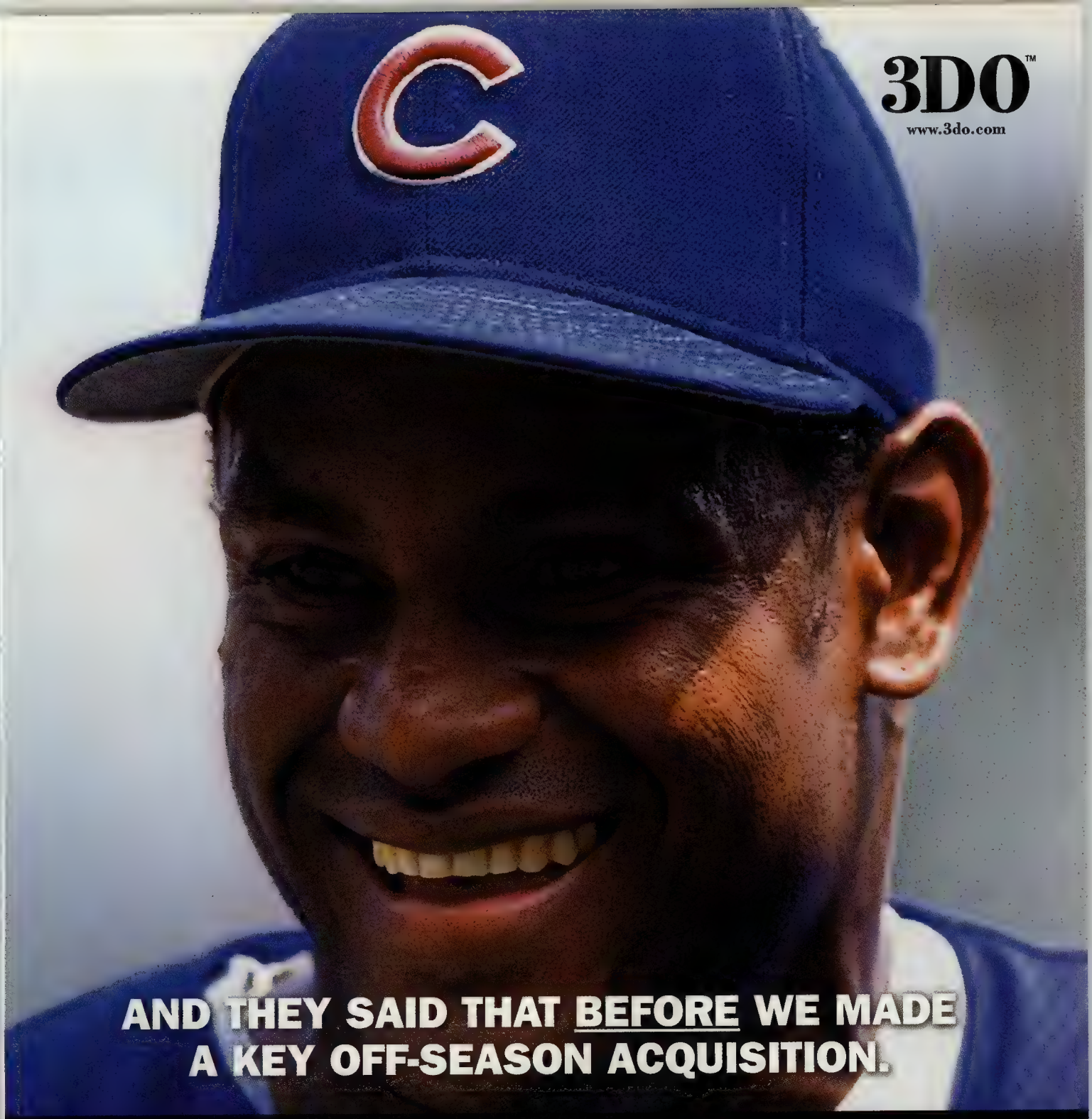




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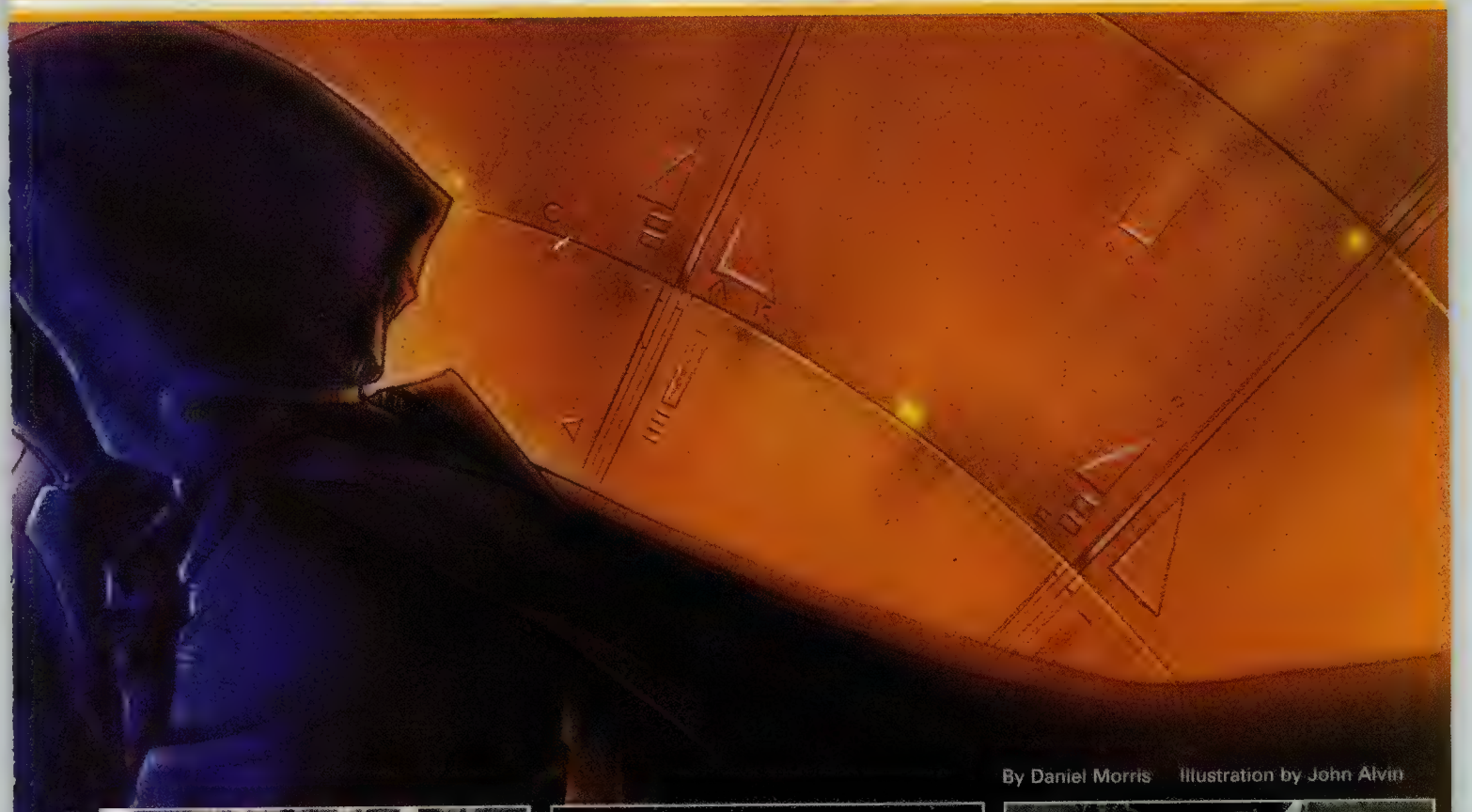
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RETURN OF THE JEDI KNIGHT



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By Daniel Morris Illustration by John Alvin







So we all saw *Star Wars: Episode One — The Phantom Menace*, and it sucked. It sucked a mountain of ass the size of an Imperial star destroyer. We took a team lunch one work day during the movie's opening week and just shook our heads in dismay at the childishness of it all. We even considered filing a class action lawsuit on behalf of all Star Wars fans, seeking custody of the franchise from George Lucas, who is clearly no longer a fit parent for the series. Of course, this realization came too late for us to avoid putting the *Episode One* games on our May 1999 cover. D'oh.

But dismiss the anguish and disappointment of the movie, and consider the fabulous possibilities of a new action game that follows a fine tradition.

We're talking now about a franchise much more exciting than Star Wars. We're talking about *Jedi Knight*, which until *Half-Life*, was *PC Gamer*'s pick for Best Game of All Time.

We're talking about the world-exclusive first look at the long-awaited *Obi-Wan*, the sequel to *Jedi Knight*. So turn the page and may the Force of our scooping power be with you.

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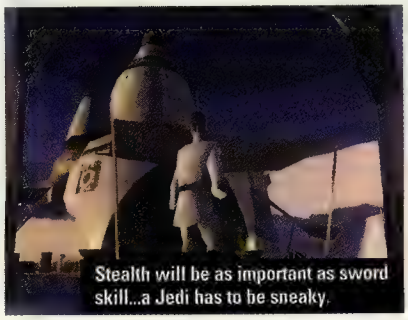
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The *Jedi Knight* sequel will take full advantage of the majestic locations such as this exotic vantage point of Coruscant (above). Use the saber for defense, too (inset).

This is not your George Lucas movie

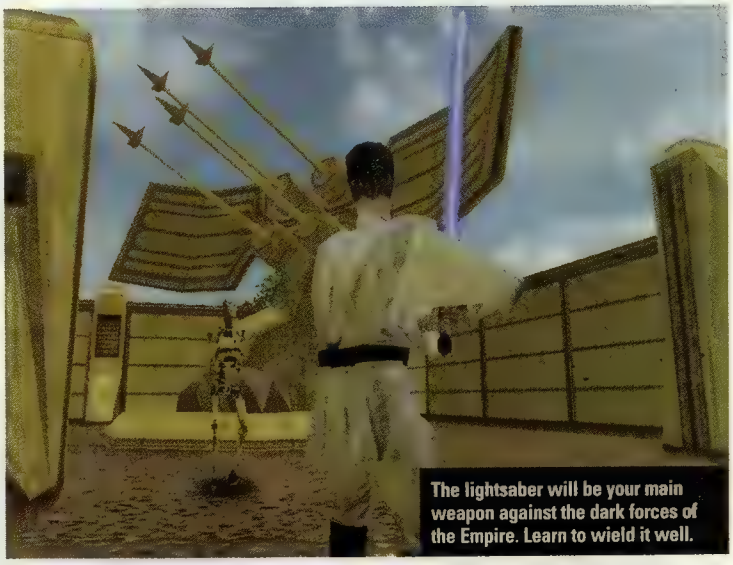
Here was the burning question: "Is this an *Episode One* game, or is it *Jedi Knight 2*?" Thankfully for all of us, the answer is the latter. *Obi-Wan* is set in the chronology of the Episode One movie, which means that it starts where the movie started and will end where the movie ended (with a hellacious lightsaber duel against Darth Maul). In between, you'll visit a lot of the locations visited in the film, in roughly the sequential order that the film deployed them.

But here's the clever catch: This game follows the Obi-Wan character all the time, and if you'll recall, he spent most of the movie off-screen. The high concept behind *Obi-Wan* is that you get to play as the fledgling Jedi Padawan in all the situations we *didn't* get to follow in the movie (because we were too busy watching Qui-Gon hit on Anakin's mom).



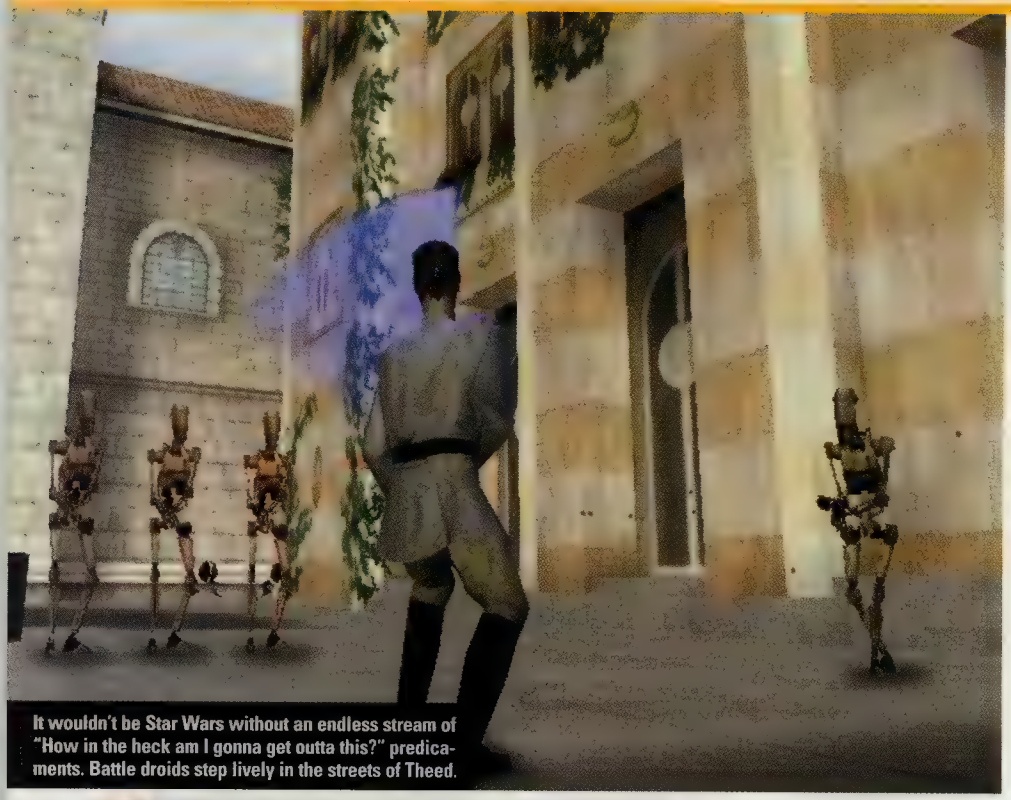
Stealth will be as important as sword skill...a Jedi has to be sneaky.

Obi-Wan will present a series of brand-new adventures that speculate on the trouble Obi (as his friends call him) got up to while everyone else was hogging the screen time. The game will show you how Tuskan raiders kidnapped Queen Amidala and her entourage, and Obi had to go fetch them from the Tuskan lair. (No surprise that Obi kept this little incident quiet.) It will let you play out Obi's sneaking around the city of Thrall in order to subdue Imperial droids that had taken townsfolk hostage. And it will also show you a harrowing pursuit high atop the towers of Coruscant, where Obi-Wan has to fight off attackers while Qui-Gon does the cushy work of meeting with the Council. (Ain't that always the way it is when you're somebody's deputy?)

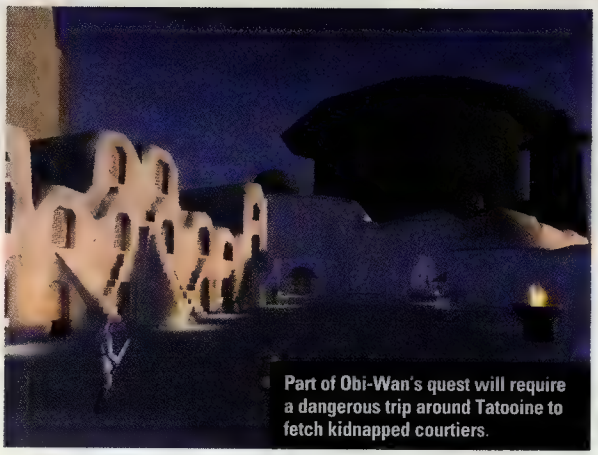


The lightsaber will be your main weapon against the dark forces of the Empire. Learn to wield it well.

"We've been given a lot of latitude to fill in the wipes and cross fades of the movie with story and character background," says project lead Steve Shaw. "An example would be when they're going to sneak back into the palace near the end of the film. They show a nice little hologram of what they're going to do then...cross fade...they're in the palace. We actually take you on that journey, show you traveling through the jungle, an ascent of the waterfalls, and a journey through ancient underground catacombs under the city."



It wouldn't be Star Wars without an endless stream of "How in the heck am I gonna get outta this?" predicaments. Battle droids step lively in the streets of Theed.



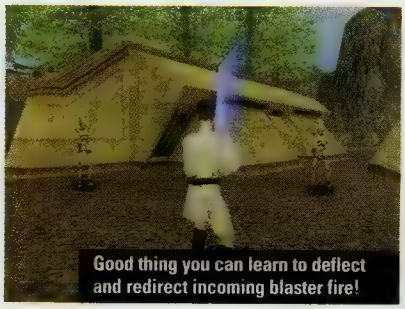
Part of Obi-Wan's quest will require a dangerous trip around Tatooine to fetch kidnapped courtiers.

Inspired by *Thief*?

There was a lot of discussion in the LucasArts offices about whether *Obi-Wan* can even accurately be classified as a first-person shooter (and therefore benefit from the goodwill garnered by the majesty of *Jedi Knight*). It's got all the trappings: gorgeous 3D engine (built from scratch, without any legacy code), plenty of baddies to dispatch, and lots of environmental derring-do thanks to a detailed and realistic physics model.

But those of you expecting a pure shooter will be very surprised to find an experience more in the vein of Eidos' *Thief: The Dark Project* (an influence cited by more than one member of the *Obi-Wan* development team). The gameplay emphasis is on sneaking around, coordinating precise surprise attacks, and swashbuckling lightsaber battles as opposed to clumsy blaster exchanges. And the majority of the game is probably best played in a third-person perspective, given that the lightsaber is easier to control in that view.

Says Shaw, "Given what we've done to expand the genre [in *Obi-Wan*] and add more elaborate movement (flips, spins, etc.), we tend to think that people will end up playing it mostly in third-person — if not to watch the elaborate movement, then to avoid getting a little nauseous."



Good thing you can learn to deflect and redirect incoming blaster fire!

Obi-Wan will also try and move in a direction more in accordance with the philosophies of *Jedi Knight*-hood. This means that intelligence and training are your only tools, and the game won't be a pick-'em-up-then-shoot-'em-up experience.

"You don't have shields or armor, you can't pick up the biggest gun and run into a room filled with enemies and expect to survive," says Shaw. "We want the player to think about encounters and try and come up with the best strategy, using the environment and whatever they can find."

"[Obi-Wan] doesn't need a blaster, he doesn't endanger innocent people," says Ryan Kaufman, one of the members of the development team. "So how do you fight enemies that do? You use stealth and cunning."

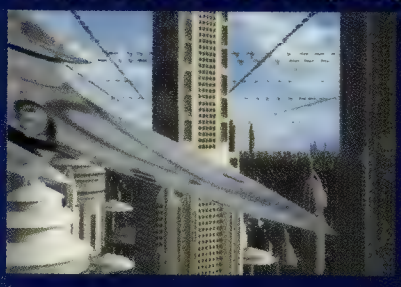
You are the Padawan learner (so learn your lightsaber-rattling)

In the boots of the young Obi-Wan Kenobi, you'll have an opportunity to develop as a Jedi knight. Your Force powers will include the Force push, which can scatter enemies and inanimate objects, and Force jumps, which let you vault long distances and survive long falls without injury. But your Force skills will develop as you progress from mission to mission, depending on how effectively you use your current Force abilities in the game.

"At the beginning of the game, Obi can push a bunch of battle droids and have them fall over," says Kaufman.

A NEW HOPE FOR NEW GAME WORLDS

The epic scope comes through in grand scale cutscenes. A peek at some of them:



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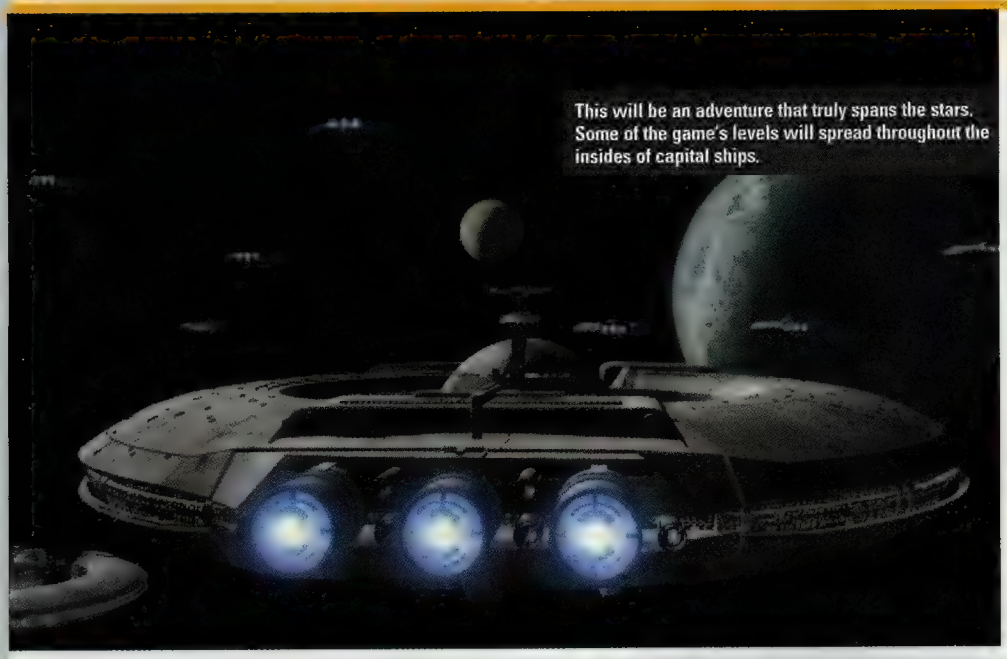
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Animated Violence

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This will be an adventure that truly spans the stars. Some of the game's levels will spread throughout the insides of capital ships.

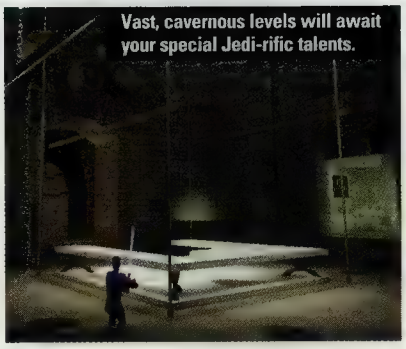
"Several more levels into the game, he can slam them against walls, pretty much destroying them. But we're not pursuing the *Jedi Knight* route, where you accumulate 15 or so incredibly-powerful Force powers, and choose among them. Obi-Wan's growth will be more natural."

Obi-Wan's personal progress will improve as the game unfolds. "You've got levels at the beginning where Obi-Wan is taking orders from Qui-Gon, who directs him as a Master should," says Kaufman. "But at the end, you'll pretty much have taken over, and will be initiating things on your own, and making decisions."

More so than any Star Wars game that has gone before it, *Obi-Wan* will offer some truly exhilarating lightsaber fights. A lot of attention has been paid into crafting detailed lightsaber duels. The mouse will serve as an actual lightsaber interface, and through different mouse motions, you'll be able to lunge, parry, slash, attack low or high, and even make jumping spinning "Jedi getting-medieval-on-your-ass" attacks.

The duels will benefit from intensive motion-capture, the advanced physics and collision detection, and the input system that allows access to a "palette" of attacks and defenses.

"Put all of this together," says Shaw, "and you have a combat system which allows the player to move fluidly, performing spins, flips, rolls, stabs, blocks, lunges...it ends up looking pretty cool."



Vast, cavernous levels will await your special Jedi-rific talents.

A HUGE AND DETAILED GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY...

The action of *Obi-Wan* will unspool over *huge* levels, and they'll be governed by a highly realistic physics model.

By "zoning" areas within the levels (and thus freeing up system memory), the design team is crafting gigantic environments in which you'll have free rein to explore. This also dispenses with long loading times, with moves through the zones being loaded invisibly as the program recognizes where you're heading. From Amidala's hometown of Theed to the deserts of Tatooine, the cathedral city of Coruscant and the underwater realm of the Gungans, the vast spectacle of the Star Wars universe will be captured in glorious detail.

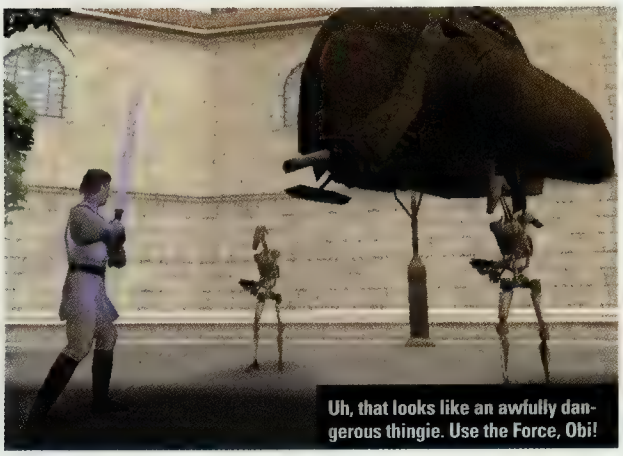
"We've already produced city-sized levels, palace-sized levels, and landing ship-sized levels. For some reason, everything went pretty big in design," says Kaufman. "The tools we're using really allowed us to go nuts and just build and build and build."

The level design team achieves such vast game architecture by arranging levels with a set of modular building blocks. As level designer Chris Williams explains: "The modules are complex systems sometimes incorporating as many as 50 individual pieces that can be arranged like LEGOs in infinite combinations to allow the level designer complete gameplay flexibility," he says. "They can be streets, corridors, or canyons that connect larger arena type spaces, or a system of buildings and walls that can be arranged to make a town."

Advanced physics will allow a higher degree of environmental interactivity than most shooter fans will be used to. You'll be able to swing from ropes and chandeliers, send droids tumbling down staircases, and watch your sub float and bob accurately on the surface of a river.

"You'll get into situations which we won't have scripted," says Shaw, "such as finding hanging flowerpots which swing when hit, and if damaged can fall, crushing whatever is below."

"The number one favorite thing to do right now is Force push a bunch of crates or flower boxes down some stairs, wiping out a bunch of hapless Battle Droids," Kaufman says. "Man, it don't get better than that. They bounce and tumble end over end; it's really, really amazing."



Uh, that looks like an awfully dangerous thingie. Use the Force, Obi!

YOUR CHANCE TO LOP JAR-JAR'S DAMN HEAD OFF

Obi-Wan is still very early in the multiplayer form and style of the game, but one aspect is already written in stone — Jar-Jar must die. The multiplayer will feature many different game modes, including the standard deathmatch, and there will be many characters from the movie available for play. These will probably include Qui-Gon, Captain Panaka, and, of course, everyone's favorite jive-talkin' fool Gungan, who will surely die a billion digital deaths once the editors of *PC Gamer* get a hold of this game.

The influence of *Team Fortress Classic* will be apparent, with a Protect the Queen convoy game. Of course, we can also expect a Saber Arena dueling mode. The designers admit that lightsaber fights will be a tricky prospect for online play, but they're hard at work on it.

The coolest prospect about *Obi-Wan*'s multiplay modes is the team's accidental discovery that any object in the gameworld can be programmed to be a participant in multiplayer combat. This means that you might be able to play as Imperial battledroids, including the rolling-ball Destroyer droids.

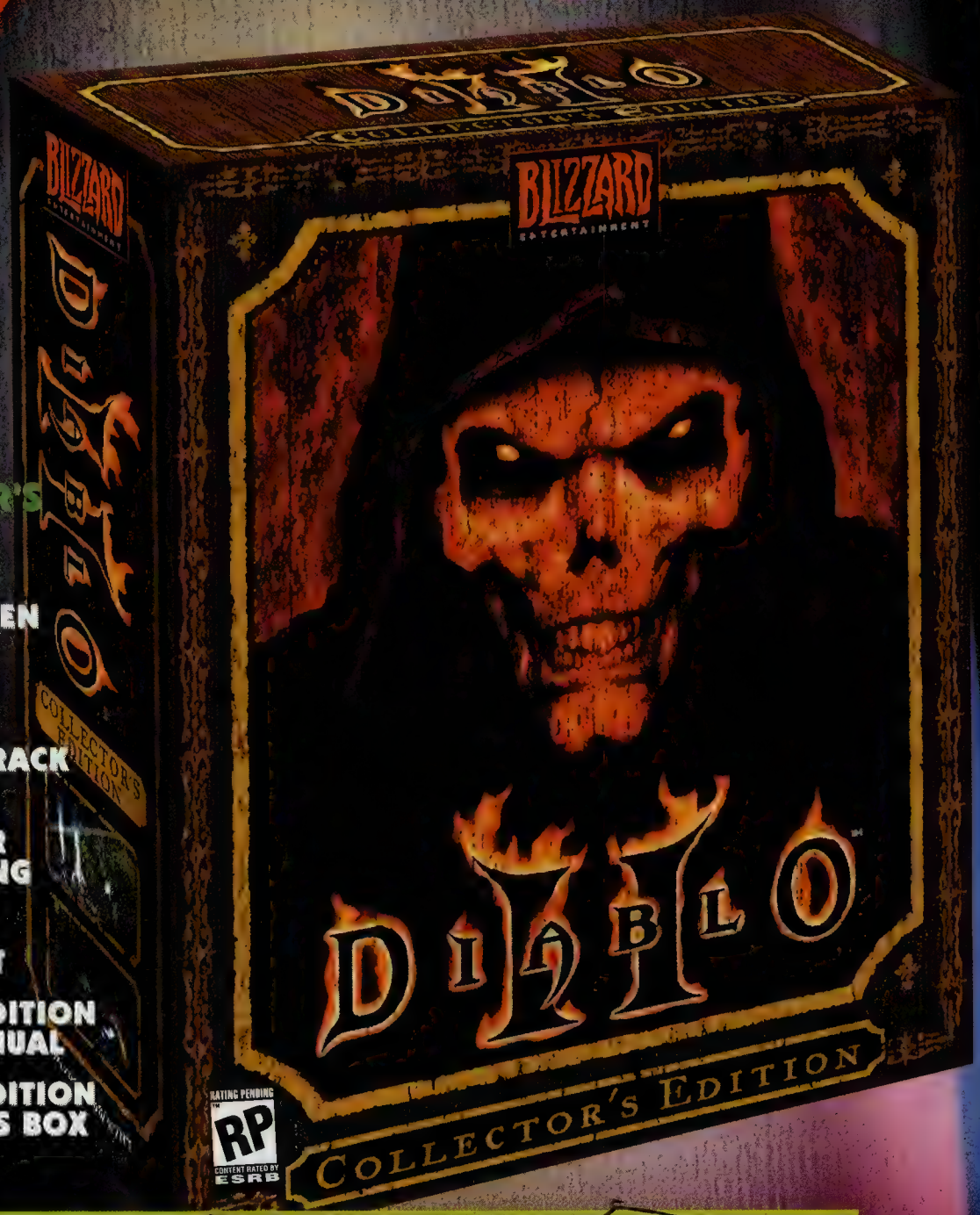
However it all shakes out, our early look at the game showed off a solid 3D action engine with dazzling environments, realistic physics, and electrifying lightsaber features.

Reclaiming the Best Game of All Time throne will be one tough challenge, but many of the fundamental elements from the award-winning *Jedi Knight* will make their way into *Obi-Wan*, and that can only be a good thing for action gamers and Star Wars fans alike.

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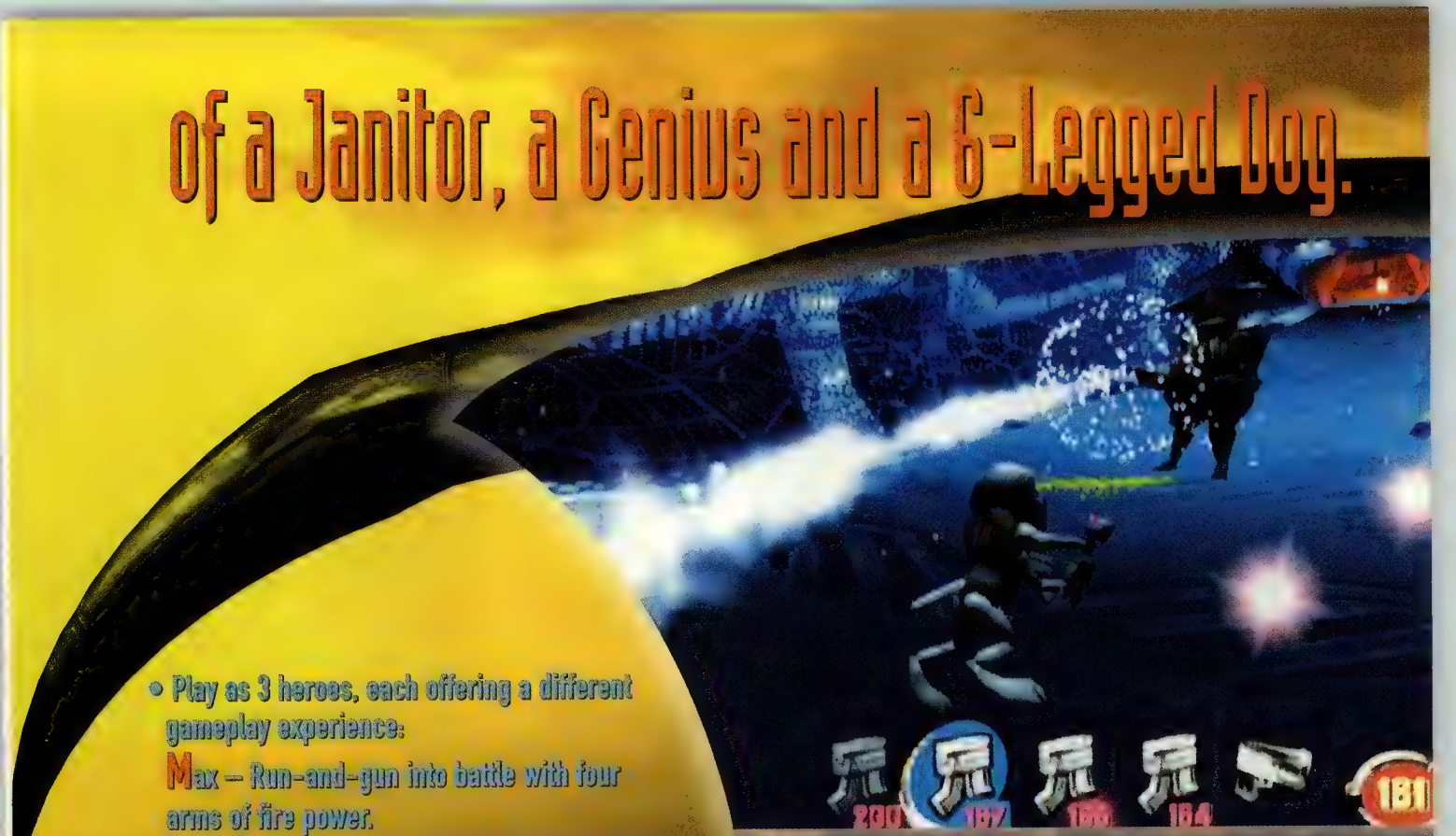
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of a Janitor, a Genius and a 6-Legged Dog.



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Where Are They Now?

DAMMIT!





Release dates are getting to be an all-too-frequent joke for most hardcore gamers. What's the point in getting excited about any game? Hot screenshots are printed in these hallowed pages, innovative concepts revealed, and exciting new game worlds and challenges unveiled. Time to get excited, right? Wrong. Take the planned release date, add at least six months, then get excited again if you can remember why you once thought the game looked promising.

There is light on the horizon, however. For the most part, these games *do* see the light of day. Eventually. So, to remind you of some of the games you're missing, but that are heading to store shelves *soon* (so we're promised), we looked up a few old friends to find out what's been taking so *damn* long...

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MAX PAYNE

■ DEVELOPER: Remedy Entertainment ■ PUBLISHER: Gathering of Developers (G.O.D.)

■ **WHAT IT IS:**
Here's a third-person action/adventure game with serious balls. *Max Payne* will be one of the grittiest games to hit the shelves since the gore-alicious *Soldier of Fortune*. This game is stuffed with two-fisted pistol action, dark urban settings, and enough violence to make Quentin Tarantino wince. You take the role of Max Payne, a tough, on-the-edge cop who's framed for murder by a corrupt government official. Obviously, it's up to Max to clear his name, and riddle a couple bus loads of bad guys with bullet holes while he does it.

■ **WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:**
We're getting tired of the whole futuristic/dungeon settings of current action games. The urban setting of *Max Payne* (assuming it's done well) is exactly the kind of change we've been looking for in the first-person shooter genre. The video trailers that we've seen make it look like a cross between John Woo's *Hard Boiled* and last year's surprisingly good flick *The Matrix*. Who can resist a combination like that? Top it off with a drop-dead gorgeous graphics engine, and you've got yourself a game worth waiting for.

■ **ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:**
Fall 1999

■ **CURRENT RELEASE DATE:**
"When it's finished."

■ **WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:**
As Epic showed with *Unreal*, developing a game *and* the game's technology takes a long time. Also, content-rich, detailed, interactive, story-filled games cannot be made in less than two years, no way, no how. So taking three years to make a triple-A title isn't surprising. What is surprising is why any developer would want to make anything less than a triple-A game.





WIZARDRY 8

- **DEVELOPER:** Sirtech
- **PUBLISHER:** To be determined

■ WHAT IT IS:
Considered one of the founding fathers of the roleplaying genre, this series has always appealed to hardcore RPG fans. The party-based, statistics-heavy roots will remain intact in this eighth iteration, as will the focus on story and character interaction. Expect a huge 3D world filled with all of the challenges, obstacles, and rewards that come with a classic roleplaying game.

■ WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:
If you've ever played any of the previous games in the series, you know the reason. The attention to detail will be phenomenal, and no design shortcuts will be taken to water down any of the roleplaying elements or to artificially extend the playing time. Eleven races and 15 character classes, multiple starting points and endings, and the choice of a phased or continuous combat mode should make this one of the most ambitious roleplaying games since the last entry in the Wizardry series, *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*, released way back in 1992!

■ ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:
Late 1998/Early 1999

■ CURRENT RELEASE DATE:
No official date has been announced, but Sirtech says that great progress is being made. We're guessing we'll see it sometime around the end of this year.

■ WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:
The time-killer has been the move to a 3D world. Back when the project was started, 3D was still in its infancy, and a lot of the work constantly had to be updated. And some of the game's development resources were diverted as the company finished *Jagged Alliance 2*.



BLACK & WHITE

- **DEVELOPER:** Lionhead Studios
- **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts

■ WHAT IT IS:



Peter "Bullfrog" Molyneux's *Populous/Magic Carpet/Dungeon Keeper* amalgam has god-like wizards battling for control of an island's inhabitants. While the AI islanders go about their own business, you manipulate them with your wizardly ways. Of vital importance to your display of power are the titans. These familiar creatures — cows, tigers, gorillas, etc. — are picked from the wilds of the game world and given super-powers. They grow to mammoth sizes, dwarfing the villages they protect or terrorize. And that's the *Black & White* conundrum: will you be benevolent to your charges and risk them becoming complacent with your kindness, or will you rule with a rod of iron *(as the new boss here at* PC Gamer *does —Ed.)* and intimidate them in to submission?

■ WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:
First, it's got Molyneux at the helm, and he's one of the most charismatic designers in the industry. Aside from the islanders that exhibit amazing behaivor patterns the superlative graphic detail in the terrain and characters, and innovative spell-casting system (whereby you have to move the mouse in certain patterns to etch out a spell's formation), it's got 15-foot-tall kick-boxing cows!

■ ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:
Christmas 1999

■ CURRENT RELEASE DATE:
Christmas 2000

■ WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:
We asked Peter Molyneux for his own explanation: "When I first explained the game design to the rest of the team, I could see the look of disbelief in everyone's eyes — surely I had gone completely mad. *Black & White*'s design spec. was highly intricate and ambitious in every aspect, and incredibly it has fulfilled and surpassed those ambitions — it is this that has taken the time. (Okay, setting up Lionhead, finding the right team, and writing every tool from scratch was a time-consuming process, too.) However, I still thought I could do the game in six months but will admit that predicting development time is perhaps not my strongest point."

With a design spec. that evolves weekly, and expands with each new idea, the game could be in development forever. Molyneux's never been fond of publisher pressure to hit deadlines. Even the current release date could be missed, though we're virtually guaranteed something startling when it finally does ship.

www.DailyRadar.com

DAMMIT!

GRAVY TRADER

■ **DEVELOPER:** Coconut Monkey ■ **PUBLISHER:** To be determined



■ **WHAT IT IS:**
Long-time *PC Gamer* readers have probably been wondering about the status of Coconut Monkey's long-awaited opus, *Gravy Trader*. We're delighted to provide the first and exclusive screenshot. *Gravy Trader* promises to be Coconut Monkey's crowning achievement, an epic strategy game that will put you in the stressful shoes of a big-time gravy merchant.

■ **WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:**
After such triumphs as *Tapestry of Injustice*, *Race the Monkey*, *Monkeyroids*, and *Fungus Gatherer SE* (all available for free download at *www.coconutmonkey.com*), we are breathless with anticipation for this simian genius' grand-scale *Civ*-killer.

■ **ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:**
Late 1980

■ **CURRENT RELEASE DATE:**
"When it's finished."

■ **WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:**
Coconut Monkey has no hands, and must be excused for his slow, methodical development process. Plus, the ambition and scope of this vast strategy masterpiece would tax the development cycle of a huge company, let alone Coconut Monkey's one-monkey operation.

WIZARDS AND WARRIORS

■ **DEVELOPER:** Heuristic Park ■ **PUBLISHER:** Activision



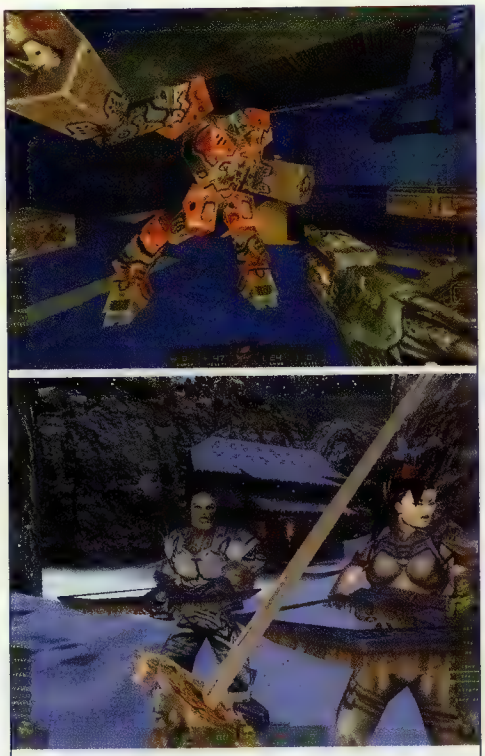
■ **WHAT IT IS:**
In the dim and distant past, this one went by the name of *Swords and Sorcery: Come Devils, Come Darkness*. A classic roleplaying game in every sense of the term (expect medieval architecture, legendary monsters, loads of spells, and all the other accouterments), this should bear a passing resemblance to the Wizardry series, as lead designer D.W. Bradley was the man at the helm of *Wizardry IV* through *VII*.

■ **WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:**
D.W. Bradley is a well-respected name in roleplaying circles thanks to his contributions to the Wizardry series, so when he's got something cooking, we're immediately interested. And although the promised online play has been nixed for the initial rollout of the game, Heuristic anticipates that upcoming sequels will easily incorporate this feature thanks to the solid foundation that has been built for the series.

■ **ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:**
October 1998

■ **CURRENT RELEASE DATE:**
Fall 2000

■ **WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:**
With every hand-off of this RPG (originally it was a Virgin title, then Westwood picked it up, and now, finally, it belongs to Activision), the release date just keeps getting bumped. Even without the hot potato treatment, it's unlikely the game would have been out already. Heuristic was more concerned with building a system that could carry its games into the future, and they think they've done just that with *Wizards and Warriors*.



DAIKATANA

■ **DEVELOPER:** ION Storm
■ **PUBLISHER:** Eidos

■ **WHAT IT IS:**
John Romero's long-delayed entry into the first-person shooter wars. The game follows Hiro Miyamoto, a warrior from the far future who looks suspiciously like John Romero. He and his two AI teammates travel through various periods of the past and future in search of a mystical sword. It's also the laughing stock of the games industry for its legendary delays.

■ **WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:**
Morbid curiosity! Actually, the game really does have some promise with the strategic use of your sidekicks among the all-out brainless combat action.

■ **ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:**
Drum roll, please. *Daikatana* was first promised for Christmas 1997.

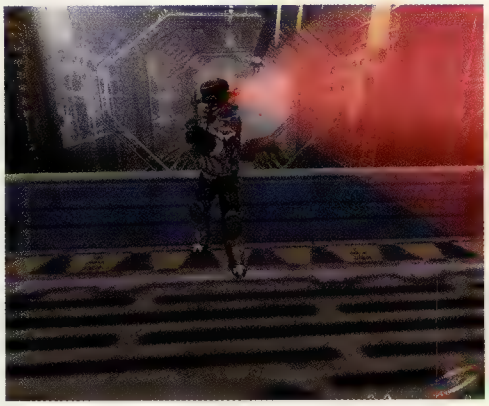
■ **CURRENT RELEASE DATE:**
Supposedly the game was all but finished as we put this issue to the presses, and could be on store shelves by the time you read this.

■ **WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:**
Well, do you have all day to hear a three-year litany of production delays? Let's just say that at one point, the entire level design team quit simultaneously. Several new lead programmers, new artists and level designers, internal wrangling, external bitching, a high-profile newspaper expose of the company, and still the plug wasn't pulled on this one. *Daikatana* defines the problem of delays, and it'll almost be a shame to see the game actually get released — what will we laugh at then? Now there's a question...



MESSIAH

■ **DEVELOPER:** Shiny Entertainment ■ **PUBLISHER:** Interplay



■ **WHAT IT IS:**
In the role of Bob, a cherub angel in the army of god, you're sent to Earth to punish sinners by possessing mutants, humans, policeman and others and use their bodies to exact retribution. In cherub mode, you have no offensive capabilities (aside perhaps, from a questionable tang of ammonia) so you need to possess armored characters to whup ass or even stealthily pass through heavily guarded areas, posing as "one of their own."

■ **WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:**
Designer Dave Perry produced the delightful *MDK*, and his unique blend of black humor and bad-ass action could make *Messiah* a game no one will soon forget. Plus, the technology driving the game engine is nothing short of amazing, allowing incredible detail in the character models and environments (remember all the hooker models that were unveiled months ago?).

■ **ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:**
Christmas 1998

■ **CURRENT RELEASE DATE:**
Summer 2000

■ **WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:**
Because the game's ambitious open-ended design allows you to take over just about anybody and do just about anything with them, it's taking Shiny a long time to iron out every gameplay possibility. As Perry says, "Because we don't know who you might save and who you might wax, we have to have multiple solutions to the problems that arise."

DIABLO II

■ **DEVELOPER:** Blizzard North ■ **PUBLISHER:** Blizzard



■ **WHAT IT IS:**
The sequel to one of the most beloved games off all time, *Diablo II* is everything that its predecessor was and more: tons of monsters, random maps, and a veritable cornucopia of weapons, armor, and magic items are all yours for the taking.

■ **WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:**
Duh! *Diablo II* is only going to be, like, the best game ever! It will be over four times larger than the original, with new features such as parallax scrolling and an evolving character model as you stock up on new armor and items. All that online cheating should be gone, too, since Blizzard has switched to a client-server model for tracking its own hosted games. Basically, if this game ends up coming out in 2008, we'll still want to play it.

■ **ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:**
Mid-to-late 1999

■ **CURRENT RELEASE DATE:**
June 2000

■ **WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:**
Making sure it has that signature "Blizzard polish" is taking longer than expected. The core game is almost done, and Blizzard North is working hard to fix all the balance issues. The main hold-up is building the *battle.net* infrastructure to support the anticipated demand, and ensuring the multiplayer community is cared for.

STILL MORE...

■ **TEAM FORTRESS 2**
Still in the works, still at least 18 months later than the planned ship, and still hotly anticipated. *TF2* could slip further in to early 2001.

■ **STARSHIP TROOPERS**
The original action game premise hit technical problems with trying to render millions of bugs on screen. The new design is more strategic, and doesn't star Denise Richards, which is a tragedy in itself. It's likely to finally release in 2001.

■ **DUKE NUKEM FOREVER**
We wanted to get more info, we really did. *DNF* won't get a public unveiling until some time in the summer, in anticipation of a Christmas release.

■ **LOOSE CANNON**
Tony "*Crusader: No Regret/Remorse*" Zurovec's driving/action game disappeared from sight only to roar back into the spotlight featuring an incredible look and some intriguing mission concepts. Originally the developers' told *PC Gamer* that the release date was, "When it's finished," but it now seems set as the fourth quarter of this year.

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GIANTS

- **DEVELOPER:** Planet Moon
- **PUBLISHER:** Interplay

■ WHAT IT IS:
Three races battle for supremacy and resources over a series of islands. The tiny, horde-like Meccarans have their weapons, but they barely seem to make an impact on the mammoth all-consuming Giant. Neither of them can get a fair handle on the marine-based Sea Reapers (as much as their naked torsos attract attention). The blend of action and strategy between these distinct races presents some intriguing possibilities.

■ WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:
Former Shiny employees (the creators of *MDK*) mix sardonic humor and innovative gameplay in a game that wowed the crowds at last year's E3 show. Aside from the bold graphics style (no one seems to have noticed or felt it necessary to mention that those Sea Reapers are really naked chicks), the diverse races present all manner of possibilities, as the Giants stomp, the Meccarans buzz, and the Reapers glide to dominance.

■ ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:
Summer 1999

■ CURRENT RELEASE DATE:
Late 2000

■ WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:
Art director Bob Stevenson says, "Part way through making *Giants*, we realized that the scope of the game was even larger than we had first thought, so we decided to do whatever it would take to make the game great. Of course, during this period, we also started Planet Moon, created a new engine, designed a completely new universe of characters, created our first multiplayer game, and managed to strike a good balance between action and strategy."

R.I.P.



Some games get delayed, others get canned outright. Where are these games now? Dead as door nails, my friend. They've officially slipped into that depressing black hole known as Development Death.

■ AMEN
The title means "So be it," and it may as well be the funeral rites for this first-person shooter. Since the departure of Chris "*TA/Dungeon Siege*" Taylor, not only has *Amen* and the adventure *Elysium* been cancelled, but the whole flippin' company has folded. D'oh.

■ BENEATH
Activision's ambitious *Tomb Raider*-killer was very far along in development when the plug was pulled. The game was to chronicle the adventures of an explorer trapped in an underground fantasy world based on the classic science fiction of author H.G. Wells.

■ TRANS-AM RACING '68-'72
The road to release has been paved with potholes for this once highly anticipated title, and now it looks like the road has been closed. The fact that the title has been in search of a new development *team* for more than a year now should have given us a clue that its release was questionable at best.

■ GUARDIANS OF JUSTICE
MicroProse had long been working on a superhero strategy game pressed in the same mold as the company's fabled *X-COM*. Using a very similar engine, *Guardians of Justice* was to let you take a team of super heroes into battle in cities around the world, fighting super-villains in a turn-based comic book-style extravaganza. Alas, the game had to swallow some harsh financial kryptonite.

■ SKIES
As SegaSoft revealed a variety of online multiplayer games (headed by *10Six*), there seemed much promise for this third-person online action adventure. Not enough promise, evidently, as it was canned some way in to development.

■ BABYLON 5
Passionate devotees of the cult science-fiction TV series were disappointed to hear about delay after delay for this Sierra adaptation. Early looks at the playable alpha builds showed great promise from this space combat game, but alleged spiraling costs in a difficult genre was its undoing. But *PC Gamer* has heard that it may yet come back from the dead, if another publisher decides to take a chance on it.

■ WARCRAFT ADVENTURES
The less said about *PC Gamer*'s June 1997 cover story, the better. The completed cutscenes and art that may have been released in some mini-movie form are now consigned to the archives.



■ NAVY SEALS
No sooner had we confirmed its continuing progress for this story than Codemasters restructed its US focus. This highly promising game is now tragically dead.



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE REDEMPTION

■ DEVELOPER: Nihilistic ■ PUBLISHER: Activision

■ WHAT IT IS:
Based on another White Wolf pen-and-paper RPG license, *Vampire* puts you in the shoes of Christof Romuald, a 12th century knight-vampire who uncovers a mystery that spans eight centuries. The third-person roleplaying game takes you from ancient Prague to modern-day London and New York in a storyline that not only details a fight against evil, but Christof's own battle with his new supernatural identity. In short — this is deep undead stuff.

■ WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:
Aside from an incredible single-player experience, *Vampire* also features the Storyteller multiplayer mode. Using Storyteller, a single player can be a "Dungeon Master," possessing non-player characters for real conversations with players, and spawning new monsters and items as needed. The seamless ability the Storyteller has to control the play means some intense multiplayer gameplay, and Nihilistic will also ship the game with editors that will let players create their own modules, with their own storylines and levels for others to play. Combining this kind of multiplayer freedom (as close to traditional pen-and-paper roleplaying as a CRPG has ever even attempted) with an incredibly simple and beautiful game engine is a winning combination.

■ ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:
Winter 1999

■ CURRENT RELEASE DATE:
Spring 2000

■ WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:
Nihilistic is making sure the game is worth the wait. Much of the work is going in to getting the Storyteller mode to work properly, which has taken quite a bit of time. While they're at it, Nihilistic is working to improve the game as a whole, and each time we've seen it, we've been even more impressed. At this writing, Nihilistic is entering a beta-testing phase to test Storyteller to the fullest. Our own Mike Wolf spent a lot of time with the Storyteller part of the game, so check out the Alternate Lives column in the March 2000 *PCG* for more info.





ONI

■ DEVELOPER: Bungie
■ PUBLISHER: Bungie

■ WHAT IT IS:
A third-person action game in an anime-style setting, *Oni* follows the tale of an agent named Konoko, who becomes embroiled in a gang-land fight where the lines get blurred as to who's the good guys and who isn't. With a couple of architects planning the cityscapes, it was assured of a distinctive look and flavor.

■ WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:
Konoko is the truly badass Lara Croft. The blend of gunplay and hand-to-hand fighting worked surprisingly well in the version that we played some time ago. And Bungie has always managed to produce entertaining (if commercially problematic) titles.

■ ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:
Late 1999

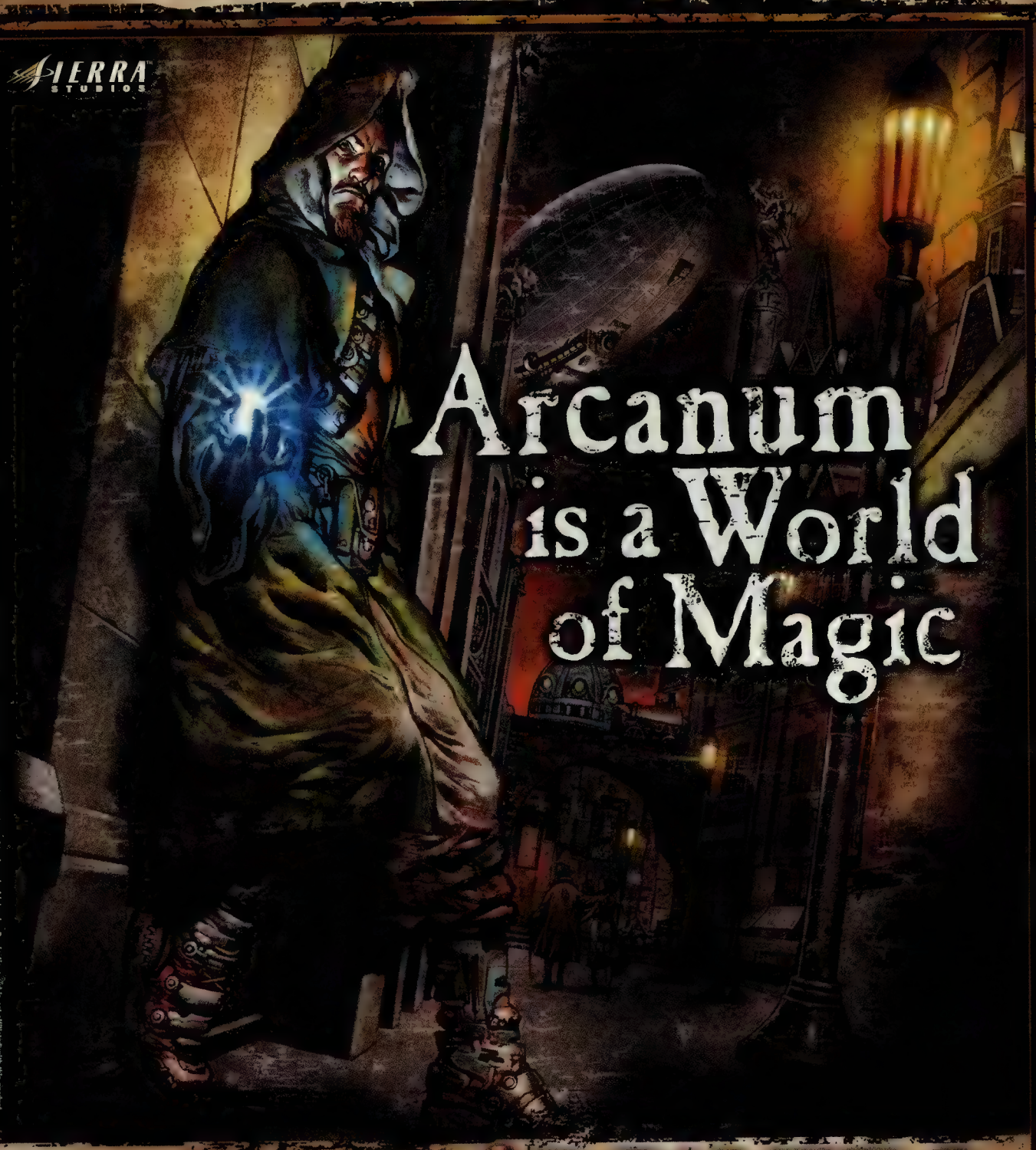
■ CURRENT RELEASE DATE:
Still to be determined.

■ WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:
Losing a lead programmer certainly didn't help, but the real choke point has been in the level design. According to Bungie, while the environments were looking great, the tools to help bring those levels to life were a bit behind the curve of current technology. So time was spent re-shaping the level design process, and along the way, they worked on better integrating the anime feel into the game. The designers have also added new features such as the ability to disarm opponents in combat, escape moves, and two-handed weapons.

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WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE THE HEART OF GAIA

■ DEVELOPER: Dreamforge Intertainment ■ PUBLISHER: Currently unknown

■ WHAT IT IS:
Dreamforge is using a highly modified version of the Unreal engine for a first- and third-person rendering of the White Wolf *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* series of pen-and-paper roleplaying game. New morphing technology will show your character's transition from man to wolf as you learn secrets about yourself, explore a deep storyline, increase in skills and abilities, and slash lots of enemies.



■ WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:
The Unreal engine is guaranteed to make the game look fantastic, and the Werewolf license from White Wolf assures a quality background to the story. Dreamforge also promises to include plenty of gifts (magic spells), and some of the creatures we've seen from the screenshots look great. Having witnessed a solid build of the engine and gameplay, it's set to be an incredible combination of first-person action game and roleplaying depth from a company with a strong RPG track record.

■ ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:
Q3 1999

■ CURRENT RELEASE DATE:
Sometime this year.

■ WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:
The original publisher, ASC Games, has quit the game publishing business leaving Dreamforge high and dry. Currently, Dreamforge (with recent dogs such as *Jeff Gorden XS Racing* and *TNN Trophy Hunter* erasing more positive memories of AD&D RPG stalwarts such as *Ravenloft*) is searching for a new publisher, but at present it can't reveal any possibilities. However, Dreamforge co-founder James Namestka assured us that "the game *will* be published, and it *will* be out this year."

MIDDLE EARTH

■ DEVELOPER: Sierra
■ PUBLISHER: Sierra

■ WHAT IT IS:
A massively multiplayer online roleplaying game set in Tolkein's magical, mythical fantasy setting. As *Ultima Online* and *Everquest* have proven, there's a ravenous audience for fantasy worlds running 24/7, and none have the reputation or mainstream pull of *Middle Earth*. Though little has been revealed about the game's design, it's likely that the art direction will follow the familiar epic tradition that has illustrated the novels for years.

■ WHY WE'RE INTERESTED:
C'mon, people, it's *Middle Earth*. This is one of the greatest fantasy worlds ever conceived, starring characters that have become legends outside the confines of a world that is ripe for exploration. It has so much history and lore but will rely on players really buying in to the setting to ensure it remains true to that focus. With the movies set for release later this year, the timing is perfect to ride the new wave of fascination with Tolkein's creation.

■ ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE:
Summer 2000

■ CURRENT RELEASE DATE:
Spring 2001

■ WHY IT'S TAKING SO DAMN LONG:
During the Sierra reorganizations the original design team was replaced with a new group, new focus and reinvigorated direction. Let's just hope that's enough to get the project on track to take full advantage of its incredible potential as both a game design and world to be shaped by fans.

NEXT YEAR'S LIST

How many games currently in development will be on this list next year?

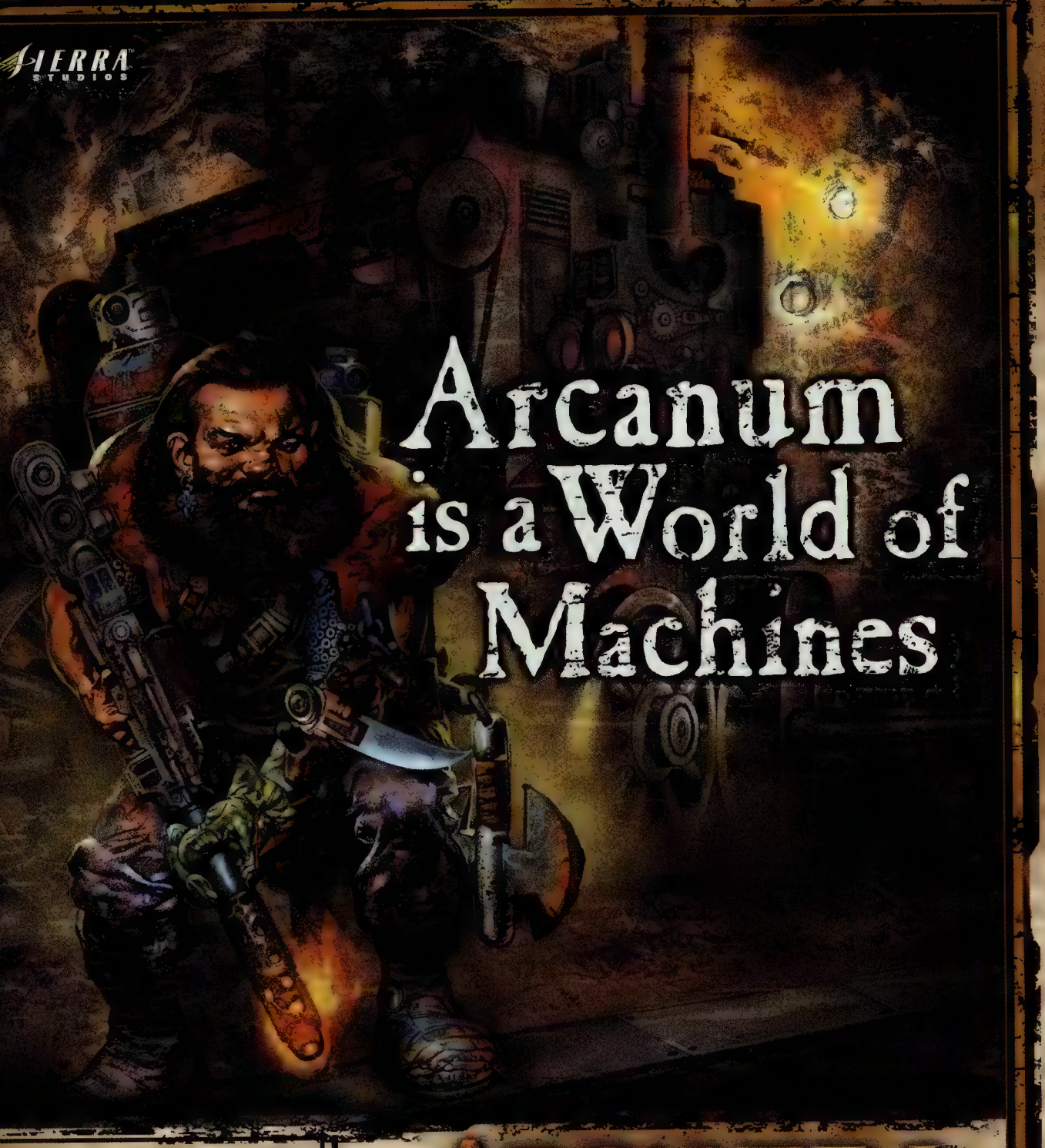


- DUNGEON SIEGE
- WARCRAFT III
- MIDDLE EARTH
- FREELANCER
- HALF-LIFE II
- DAIKATANA II
- ANACHRONOX
- GRAVY TRADER 2: THE ANNIHILATION

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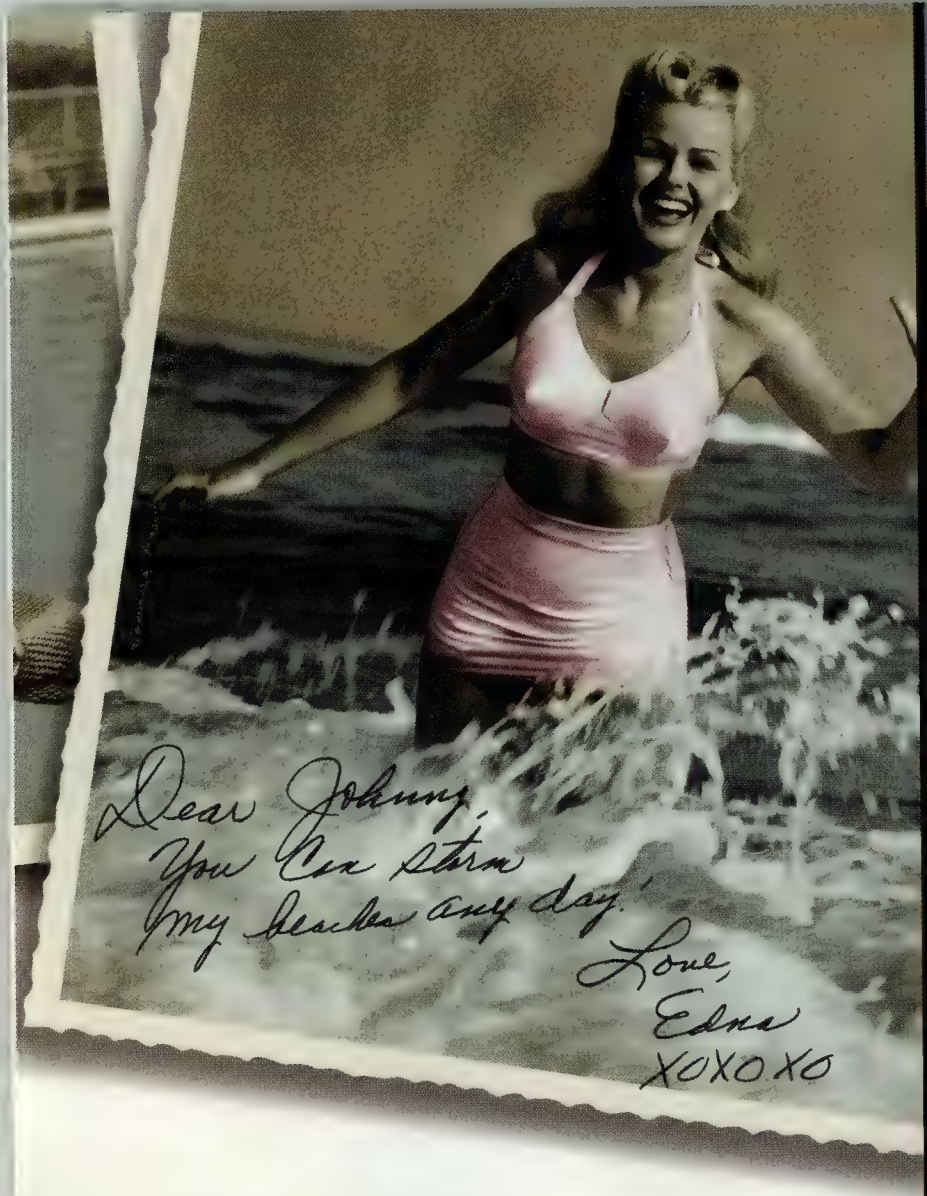
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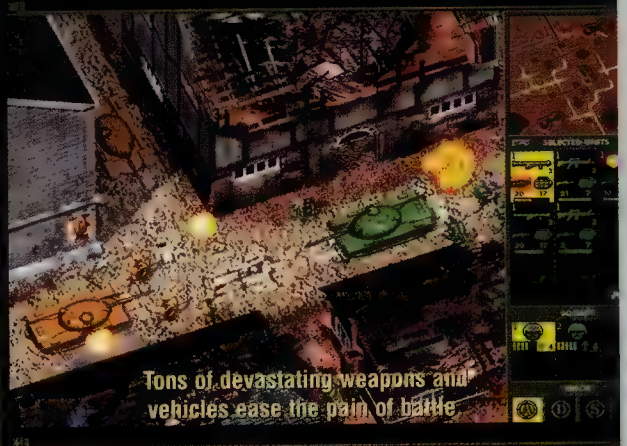
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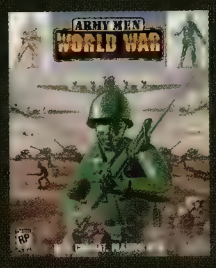






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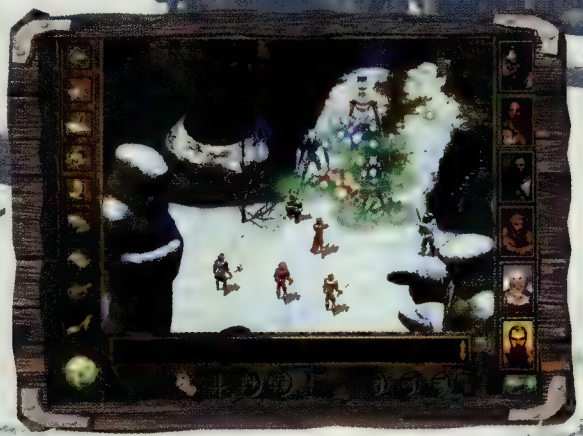
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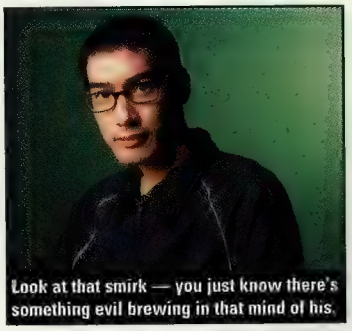
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Be Gone, Jackal

Say it ain't so! It is truly the end of a woeful era. Our own assistant art director, Jay Vidheecharoen, is leaving *PC Gamer*. Gone are the days of constant jackalization; the abuse that we take from The Jackal has finally come to an end. Jay is taking his negativistic talents to greener pastures by jumping onto the Internet Money Truck and riding the New Economy all the way to the bank.

The Jackal may be gone, but he did leave his mark. This month was a Jackal's dream come true. The sheer volume of gaming badness that we had to endure only fed the twisted flames of hatred and bitterness within him. He took one look at *Search for the Golden Dolphin* and was instantly hit with debilitating spasms of laughter. It didn't end there; *Swamp Buggy Racing* prompted The Jackal to shake his head slowly and utter the infamous words, "I can't be bothered."

The level of jackalization was so high that it spilled out of the *PC Gamer* offices and into those of the poor chaps over at *DailyRadar.com*. Jay took one look at the PlayStation 2 and left the room, muttering to himself, "Such crap." His next victims were our friendly neighbors at *PC Exaggerator*. He walked into an intense deathmatch session of *Soldier of Fortune* and gave it both barrels, saying, "So very poor. I can't be bothered."


Look at that smirk — you just know there's something evil brewing in that mind of his.

It didn't end there. Before his departure, The Jackal gave us a dark prophecy: "There is another Jackal, and he is already among you. This is not the end; it is merely the beginning of a new age of jackalization!" We all hugged each other a little tighter as Jay's dark laughter filled the room and he vanished in a puff of putrid yellow smoke.

Since then things have gone back to normal, but we still keep a wary eye open for any hint as to who the new Jackal may be. Everyone is a suspect. Could the hidden jackal among us be Jeremy? We already know his innocent face is just a mask covering a hidden evil. Or how about Dan? We've often heard him turn away from games in disgust while uttering, "So very poor." Or could it be our new art director Joe — after all, he used to work in New York City, a virtual den of jackals.

In any case, the original will never be surpassed. So long, Jackal.

Hardware Requirements

With each *PC Gamer* review, you'll find two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements and the hardware configurations we recommend as the *least* you'll need to really enjoy the game. While a game will run on the minimum system the manufacturer specifies, it might not run all that well. Because of this, we test each game on several systems so we can bring you a more realistic assessment of what you'll *really* need.

THE PC GAMER RATINGS SYSTEM

100%–90% CLASSIC
Not many games can earn a rating higher than 90%, and even fewer can approach the magic 100. Anything that we rate higher than 90% is an instant classic — a game that's truly significant in both content and design, and one that we'd recommend without reservation to anyone interested in PC gaming.

89%–80% EXCELLENT
These are excellent games. Anything that scores in this range is well worth your attention, though it may not make any significant advances over its rivals. Also, some genuine benchmark games of decidedly specialist taste will fall into this area — it may be the best 7th Cavalry simulation on the market, but not all of us want to relive Little Bighorn.

79%–70% VERY GOOD
These are pretty good games, which we would recommend to fans of the particular genre — although it's a safe bet that there are probably better games out there.

69%–60% GOOD
A reasonable, above-average game. It may be worth buying, but probably has a few significant flaws that keep it from earning a higher rating.

59%–50% FAIR
Very ordinary games. Not completely worthless, but not a very good way to spend your gaming dollar, either.

49%–40% BELOW AVERAGE
Poor quality. Only a few, slightly redeeming features keep them from falling into the abyss of the next category....

39%–0% DON'T BOTHER
Just terrible games — and the lower you go, the worse they get. Avoid these titles like the plague — and don't say we didn't warn you!

EDITORS' CHOICE

Every month, we honor the best games we see — those earning 88% or higher — with our Editors' Choice award. It's not easy to earn, and there are a lot of excellent games that fall just short of the honor. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on a game at a local software shop, you can bet it's among the best.



STEAMING TOSS

It's not our fault, really it isn't. Normally we highlight the Game of the Month here. For the first time since we instituted the award, there are no winners. In fact, some of the dross that crossed our desks this month made us very, very sad. So revel in the hilarity of this bunch of sorry-assed trash.







Invictus: In the Shadow of Olympus

CATEGORY: Real-time strategy **DEVELOPER:** Quicksilver **PUBLISHER:** Interplay, (800) INTERPLAY, *www.interplay.com* **REQUIRED:** P266, 64MB RAM, 360MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** PII 300, 128MB RAM, 550MB hard-drive space **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Modem, IPX, TCP/IP, Max. players: 4

Rest assured — though there may be similarities, this is not what *WarCraft III* will be like.

With a degree in Classical Studies and a continuing fascination with Greek history, I figured that *Invictus* was a game that had my name written all over it. Unfortunately, it seems that my name is "boring, unpolished hodge-podge."

Developer Quicksilver (of *Conquest of the New World* fame) created this real-time strategy game of sorts featuring heroes from Greek mythology who develop over the course of the twenty-some missions. You might even call it a roleplaying strategy game — though of course that's a genre that Blizzard would rather pioneer with *WarCraft III*. And frankly, that might be a better foot for this new genre to get off on.



Togas don't have pockets — it's official. Each hero can only carry three different items.

Invictus uses a rotating 3D engine (like *Myth*, but in pre-production) on which to maneuver your heroes and units as you complete a variety of quests for Athena. The goddess of wisdom has ended up in another tiff with Poseidon. The god of the sea (and miserable old bugger) is going nuts, and you've got to prove that you're hero enough to save the day.

The journey takes you over a fictional map of islands on a bunch of unconnected missions. At the beginning, you select two heroes from a stable of ten, each with differing attack styles and abilities (Achilles and Hercules are warriors, Icarus can fly, Hippolyta and Electra have spell attacks, etc.). With a limited amount of cash, you flesh out the adventuring party with some sword fodder such as spearmen, but progressing to gorgons, minotaurs, harpies and sabretooth tigers once you've encountered them. Since these units can be upgraded, it's easy to get attached to them.



Always target archers at enemies already in melee, or the cheating AI will send units at them before they get their first arrow notched.

The game requires a surprising amount of tactical finesse, since the different unit types and their many upgrade varieties make for a good depth of generalship. The majority of gameplay is concerned with making the smartest selections of party makeup and juggling the best coordinated tactics for the unit mix.

Adjustable aggression levels, which allow you to set the tendencies of your party members, are effective for letting you explore the map. Frustratingly, once you've completed the prime mission objective, there's a quick countdown and it ends, leaving no time to mop up any gold or items (particularly health apples) dropped during the fight.

With time-based missions and limited help from NPCs, completing a mission on the first try often means a frustrating reliance on blind luck and stumbling across your objective. Obtuse puzzles don't help.

Nor does it help that the graphics look like crap. Playable only in 640x480, the game sets a zoom level per mission dependent upon how many monsters you're likely to face. Textures are smudgy, buildings are bland, and all the flavor of the setting is pure vanilla.

A few multiplayer options extend the play value, though they devolve into mad rushes for objectives (since the heroes are hugely powerful). It's a shame that *Invictus* is so slipshod in so many areas, since it has some good ideas and potential in its core gameplay. But the list of design fixes it needs to make it worthy of full price purchase is way too excessive. It's a pity.

—Rob Smith

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Some fun large-scale battles; replayability.

LOWS: Misses with the setting; crap graphics; lame humor; convoluted objectives.

59%

BOTTOM LINE: Failing to take real advantage of the setting is its biggest crime. Not polishing the features is its second.

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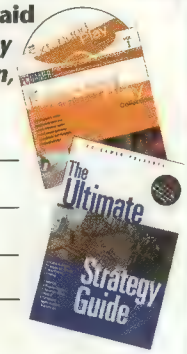
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Superbike 2000

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

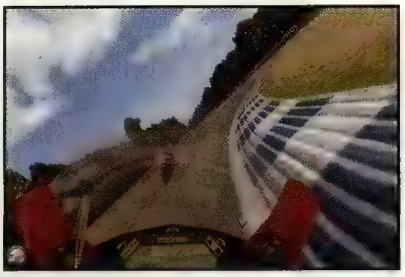
CATEGORY: Racing **DEVELOPER:** Milestone **PUBLISHER:** EA Sports, (650) 628-1001, *www.easports.com* **REQUIRED:** P233, 32MB RAM, 300MB hard-drive space, 2MB video card **WE RECOMMEND:** PII 450, 128MB RAM, 3D accelerator with 8MB memory, Analog joystick **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** IPX, Max. players: 8

Flipping head-first over a rocketing motorcycle and walking away unharmed; that is the very definition of Gaming Goodness.

For all of you who've become firmly convinced that EA Sports makes fun but unrealistic racing simulations, here's a bit of late-breaking news. *Superbike 2000* is here, and with this brilliantly impressive motorcycle simulation, the publisher who's been the whipping-boy of a legion of hard-core simulation fans has truly redeemed itself.

Before I begin the torrents of praise I have for *Superbike 2000*, there's one thing that must be made perfectly clear: with all realism settings on full and the difficulty settings at their highest, this is not a game for the impatient or easily frustrated. Just tweaking your controller until it responds the way that feels best for your driving style is a major undertaking — especially if you've got three or four different input devices to choose from, all of which *seem* to offer their own distinct advantages. Naturally, how you set up your bike has a profound effect on your performance regardless of your input device — which sucks mightily when running a Quick Start Race, since default setups are used for all bikes in these races.

But the real challenge lies in the Single Races and Championship mode, and *Superbike* has everything you need to experience the thrills to their fullest. All 13 circuits from the 1999 World Superbike Championship are included (along with 20 real-life riders, though thankfully you can change their names to yours!); amongst them you'll find every challenge facing a superbike rider, from the gentle yet subtly deceptive curves of Monza and the blistering straightaways of Hockenheim to the brutal Corkscrew at Laguna Seca. (Note to fans of auto-racing sims: getting through the 'Screw on a bike is *considerably* harder on two wheels than on four!) While bike customizing is a bit limited — you can only adjust stuff like suspension and gear ratios by moving them through pre-determined settings — there's still plenty of room for grooming your ride to your own personal tastes.



It just doesn't feel any better than this — until that big bike slides out from under you, that is!



Pile-ups can occur even during the opening moments of the race; Instant Replay displays the mayhem.

Unlike 1998's *Castrol Honda Superbike World Champions*, you're given access to the full complement of high-powered horses: Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki, Ducati, Aprilia, and Yamaha. Each features a distinctive readout for speed and RPMs, and while there isn't a huge difference in handling characteristics, there are a ton of differences in the ways the bikes accelerate and brake.

Given EA Sports' deep pockets, it's no surprise they were able to snag the licenses for all these different tracks and bikes. What is a bit shocking, however, is just how realistic the action is here — especially since most folks associate EA Sports with "motorsports light." Some gamers (and reviewers) will undoubtedly whine that something must be amiss with the game's physics — why else would they see their bikes sliding out from under them in curves, or find themselves plunging headlong into hay bales?

But the truth is that stuff happens all the time in real life, and if you ain't got the guts for it, then you can always activate one of the several rider aids to make things easier (and more arcade-like). This detail makes it seem like it sucks if you play for an hour, but spend a few days racing, and it'll feel like the hottest thing since the internal combustion engine.

EA Sports covered just about every aspect of a superbike-racing sim you can imagine, save one: multiplayer match-ups. Despite the claims of "new online racing with Internet support" on the EA Sports website, all it really means is being able to hook up with someone using their IP address — which in turn facilitates the need for some type of chat room or match-making area where players can exchange that info. Sadly, no such option has been included in the game.

You'll need plenty of CPU and video-card muscle to appreciate *Superbike 2000*'s awesome graphics — I'll let the pix speak for themselves — but that's a criticism hardly unique to this game. For fans of high-powered cycling action, *Superbike 2000* should be added to the "must-buy" list.

—Stephen Poole

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

89%

HIGHS: Jaw-dropping graphics; a plethora of options; authentic tracks; and realistic AI.

LOWS: Steep system requirements; may be hard for newbies; poor 'net matchmaking support.

BOTTOM LINE: If you've got some time to practice your skills, you're in for big-time thrills.

Shadow Watch

CATEGORY: Strategy **DEVELOPER:** Red Storm Entertainment **PUBLISHER:** Red Storm Entertainment, (919) 460-1776, *www.redstorm.com* **REQUIRED:** P133, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** PII 350, 64MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

Red Storm Entertainment sneaks in an off-beat strategy title between its Rainbow Six products.

It wouldn't be surprising after *Dominant Species* and *Force 21* if Red Storm decided to stay more focused on the Rainbow Six franchise. But no. Right before the release of the *Rogue Spear* expansion, Red Storm opted to take a chance on a turn-based strategy/RPG by the name of *Shadow Watch*.

Artistically inspired by contemporary comic books, *Shadow Watch* features all the spiffy trimmings of the genre: physics are exaggerated, unit functionality is limited, and the graphics are reminiscent of a Todd McFarlane comic book. The other real identifying mark is *Shadow Watch's* lack of over-complicated, *Jagged Alliance*-style micro-management.

Lurking in the dark alleys of our planet's shadier nations, a conspiracy to stop the launch of the first international space station is underway. Hired to investigate, and quite possibly break more than a few kneecaps, is one of the best-kept secrets of the 21st century: the Shadow Watch. Taking command of this elite fighting force, your job will be to travel the world and get results — quick.

There are six highly specialized members in Shadow Watch: Gennady, the expert on gadgets; Maya, the sniper; Rafael, demolition expert; Lily, martial artist; Bear, shotgun-toting muscle-man; and Archer, leader of the operation. Each member is vital to succeeding in any one of the game's three dangerous locales: Hong Kong, Rio De Janeiro, and Baikonur, Russia. If one of the six members dies, it's curtains for the whole crew, and you must start the mission over.



Maria is your curvaceous contact in Rio De Janeiro, one of the game's three locations.



Watch the windows or the bad guys can surprise you by firing through them.

Rendered in the classic three-quarter isometric view, gameplay is easy to learn, and easy to master. You issue simple orders: walk, run, duck, shoot, open doors, cover areas, and pick up key items (provided you have Action Points left). All the commands are assigned to cleverly placed hot-keys, so anyone familiar with the "left hand on arrow keys" style of play will be right at home.

Also hardwired into the gameplay engine is the ability to E-mail friends your mission success files: best times, best scores, etc. But this is a sad attempt at covering up the fact that *Shadow Watch* doesn't have a multiplayer mode.

Like a comic book, the physics are intentionally exaggerated: body armor is near-impossible to penetrate, and bar stools and other small objects provide adequate cover for an adult male. The heightened reality of the gameworld is a pleasantly fun change of pace from the ultra-realism trend in games these days. Still, it omits crucial unit functions such as picking up or dragging fallen teammates — a terrible design flaw when a teammate blocks a doorway and you can't step over him or get him out of the way.

As you make your way through the levels of *Shadow Watch*, each of your characters gains different experience points for their actions, thus earning them access to useful skills such as First Aid, Martial Arts, and Pick Locks. Ability advancements like Shot Accuracy, Better Armor, and More Action Points are tied into certain skills.

Where it really excels is in the graphics and audio department. The entire game is beautifully hand-drawn — from the characters' 5,000 animations to the pre-mission interrogation scenes where you deal with scientists, military officers, and Asian gangsters to gather pieces of the puzzle. Audio is also a tasty treat with more than an hour of recorded dialogue, a haunting musical score, and the real-world sounds of doors creaking, grenades exploding, and silenced pistols whizzing.

Shadow Watch's gameplay is still not even in the same ballpark as *X-COM* — but it's got its own goofy charms. The comic book atmosphere is undeniably attractive. And like icing on the cake, *Shadow Watch* randomizes each mission to assure long-term value.

If it weren't for the lack of unit functionality, and the lack of multiplayer, I would've recommended this game more strongly.

–Nash Werner

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

71%

HIGHS: Hip, comic book-style graphics; simple controls, well-written storyline.

LOWS: Limited unit functionality; no multiplayer mode in a game that screams for it.

BOTTOM LINE: Never overcomplicated, this offers user-friendly turn-based action.

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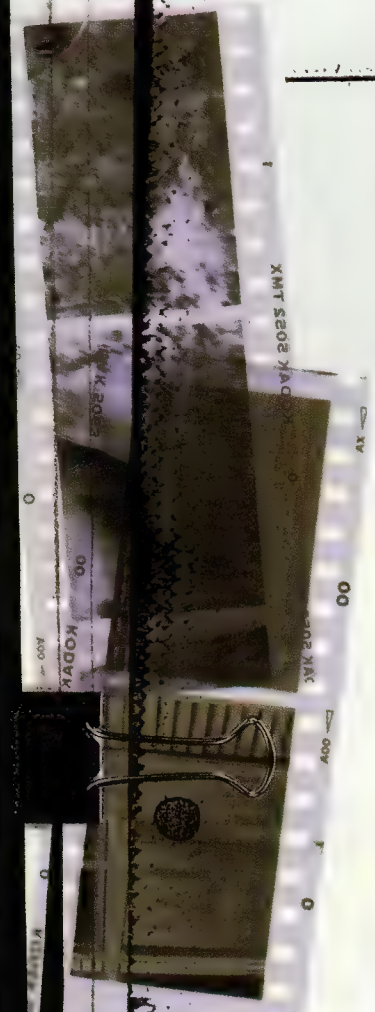
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- Find a way to build your own capabilities to the point where you have a chance of defeating the one with God-like powers.



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CONSEQUENCES:

Diagram B2 Situational Missions (Fig.'s 2.1-2.6)

Fig. 2.1 build your own capabilities



Fig. 2.2 establish base of operations

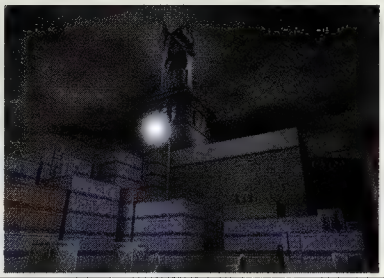


Fig. 2.3 maintain control over Ambrosia

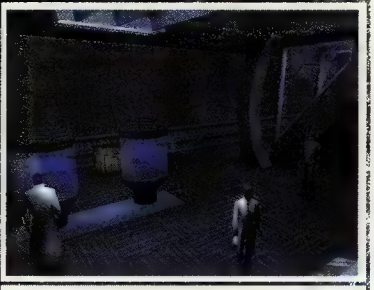


Fig. 2.4 Survive incarceration



Fig. 2.5 establish ties to ally base



Fig. 2.6 Expand your pool of allies



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Campaign 1776

CATEGORY: Strategy **DEVELOPER:** HPS Simulations **PUBLISHER:** HPS, (408) 554-8381, *www.hpssims.com* **REQUIRED:** P120, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard-drive space
WE RECOMMEND: P200, 64MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Hotseat, IPX, PBEM, Modem, Max. players: 2

The American Revolution finally gets a game worthy of its importance, as HPS flexes some new-found muscle.

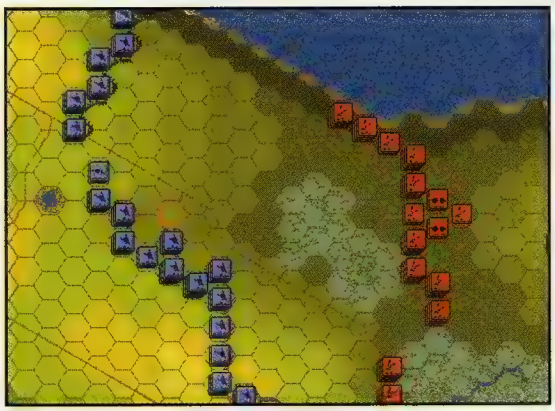
It's been at least ten years since the last PC simulation of the Revolutionary War (*Revolution 1776*; Brittanica Software). It tanked, and deservedly so — mostly, it was an academic treatise on Colonial politics with virtually no bang-bang. Unanimously, the big companies concluded that the subject was just too esoteric to justify development costs. One could argue that point 'til the cows come home, but now thankfully this niche has been addressed, quite handsomely, by tiny, feisty, independent developer HPS.

Campaign 1776 is a John Tiller creation. Fans of the pre-Take-Two Talonsoft games (the Battleground cycle, *East Front*, etc.) will immediately recognize Tiller's style: big colorful maps, oblique 2D views, units that look like hand-painted miniatures, and a burly toolbox interface. They will also recognize the lush, painterly graphics of veteran designer Joe Amoral. In short, this may be a "low-budget" game, but it has first-rate production values throughout.

Battles fought in North America between 1776-1782 had a unique flavor — only superficially did they resemble the Napoleonic campaigns that would soon dominate European affairs. The terrain was wild and nearly roadless, and even the biggest "city" was a mere rustic village by European standards. The numbers of men involved were comparatively small, artillery seldom played more than a marginal role, and cavalry forces were minuscule.

Tiller's "grand tactical" design admirably captures these elusive distinctions. Time and distance scales (one turn = 5 minutes/one hex = 125 feet) seem just right. So does the qualitative difference between militia and regulars. Firepower effects feel right, too: "Don't fire 'til you see the whites of their eyes!" is good military advice, because musketry casualties drop to almost zilch at ranges greater than three hexes. As was true historically, armies were more likely to be defeated by fatigue and disruption than from heavy casualties.

Some of these maps are really, really big — bigger than they need to be for the scenarios assigned to them. A custom campaign option does let you take those maps and create other historical scenarios that were omitted for time reasons. Indeed, if you open the campaign files, you can see all the possible branches and their chance-of-happening percentages. With a little practice, you can reshuffle the elements to create campaigns as long and intricate as you like.



You there, stop snickering at the back. This clearly shows the two sides running away from each other!

My one beef with *Campaign 1776* is that if either side wins a really crushing victory in the first battle, the campaign often segues to the final confrontation in the scenario chain. Two battles make for a pretty skimpy campaign. On the other hand, I suppose that's what the Campaign Editor is for.

Online games tend to be leisurely and courteous — as if everyone who's interested in this period had adopted 18th-Century manners. What a refreshing change from the usual vitriol and bluster!

For that audience, the game is self-recommending. Non-grognards will not find it intimidating, either. And I cannot help but observe that if this simulation were adopted in high school history courses, the whole subject of the Revolution would dramatically come to life. After all, it was a miracle that the colonists won...and if they'd lost, we'd all be talking like Rob Smith. Horrors.

—William Trotter



No, this is not an old screenshot from the days of the 386. It actually requires a Pentium (though barely) and then you get to play in glorious technicolor with all the little soldiers. Cool, eh!

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

87%

HIGHS: Looks, feels, and plays very true to its subject matter; excellent scenario design.

LOWS: Campaign games can be disappointingly brief.

BOTTOM LINE: It's a niche product, no question about it, but an excellent one.

www.DailyRadar.com

NFL Blitz 2000

CATEGORY: Sports **DEVELOPER:** Midway/Point of View **PUBLISHER:** Infogrames, (800) 245-7744, *www.infogrames.net* **REQUIRED:** P166, 32MB RAM, 150MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** PII 300, 64MB RAM, 3dfx-based accelerator card with 8MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Hotseat, Max. players: 4

Mix the essence of football with the attitude of hockey, spice with graphical glitz, and you've got *Blitz*.

Although we certainly don't want to accuse Midway of gilding the lily, we've never really been the greatest fans of the company's arcade sports titles, in which gameplay and variety clashes head-on with bombast and shiny graphics, and always comes out the loser. *NFL Blitz 2000* is largely similar to last year's edition, but with the welcome addition of easier passing and a playbook editor. Nonetheless, it's still just a fast and flat arcade bash that quickly grows routine.

The gameplay in *NFL Blitz 2000* will be immediately familiar to anyone who has played other Midway sports titles. There are the obligatory pass, shoot and turbo buttons, and by pressing them in different combinations you can get the players to perform any super-athletic maneuver from high hurdling to throwing a pass in mid-jump. Although it's not entirely a simple exercise in button mashing, the emphasis is definitely on quick reflexes rather than any understanding of football.

As simple as the controls are, one of the main problems with previous Blitz titles was the awkward passing scheme. Fortunately, the *2000* iteration features a much simpler passing system based solely on preset buttons, so passing to the left requires a simple press of a button rather than the usual aiming system. This allows for dramatic cross-field passes to backs in the flat.



Expect to see some bone-cushing, helmet-displacing open field tackles.

Other improvements this year include the addition of audibles, new animations and stadiums, and a season mode. But by far the best improvement is the playbook editor. Given the rather meager number of plays to be found in previous versions of *NFL Blitz* (there are only nine defensive plays to choose from), the addition of an editor is the best way to breathe replayability into the game, although this one is hardly comprehensive. On offense, you can only set the depth of the quarterback and design the routes of the receivers. And on defense, you simply position a player and tell him to play man or zone. There is a practice mode for working on timing, but pinpoint passing routes are not that helpful in a game where pass interference is not only legal but rampant.



As Bay Area residents, our loyalties will always be with our beloved 49ers, even though the only place we can see them win these days is on our PC.

Customizable plays are further diminished by the ridiculously accelerated pace of the action. You only have ten seconds to pick a play and have to rumble 30 yards for a first down. Although there is a turbo button, it should be more accurately labeled the "even more turbo" button because of the game's already frantic pace. And like most Midway games, the single-player version is hampered by the miracle comeback that the computer routinely employs late in the game, no matter how badly it's losing.

The graphics in *NFL Blitz 2000* can look decent, but only at high resolutions on fast machines with 3dfx-based accelerators. Since the arcade version was powered by a 3dfx chip, the PC version looks identical on systems with Glide-based video cards. However, PCs without 3dfx-based cards experience significant frame drops even at lower resolutions, and the Direct3D performance is not nearly as smooth. Although there is an option to turn frame-skipping on or off, deciding between uneven speed and jagged animation is hardly the kind of choices gamers should be making in the year 2000.

Further hampering the presentation are the generic sound effects and obnoxious announcer. After every play, you have the opportunity to bless your opponents with a body slam or an atomic elbow drop, but the accompanying crunches and taunting quickly become tiresome. And it will only take a few games before the announcer's limited vocabulary of guffaws and exclamations quickly wears out its welcome.

Furthermore, the interface is clumsy and has no mouse support. Gamepads are a necessity to enjoy the action, but analogue controllers like the Gravis Xterminator aren't used to their full advantage. And worse, though *Blitz* does support four players shoe-horned onto the same machine (two on keyboard and two with gamepads), there's no Internet or even LAN support.

While *NFL Blitz 2000* may provide speed freaks with 3dfx boards a few hours of distraction, the rest of us can safely ignore it.

—Jim Preston

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

48%

HIGHS: Smooth graphics on 3dfx-based systems; new playbook editor; lots of action.

LOWS: Shallow gameplay; clumsy interface; lack of innovation.

BOTTOM LINE: Fun for a little while, but it quickly grows stale and monotonous.

International Soccer 2000

CATEGORY: Sports **DEVELOPER:** Rage Software **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft, (800) 429-9400, *www.microsoft.com/sports/soccer2000* **REQUIRED:** P133, 32MB RAM, 100MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** P200, 4MB 3D accelerator card **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Two-player hotseat

Microsoft targets EA Sports' FIFA franchise, and comes out a winner.

For a sport that's not particularly fashionable on this side of the Atlantic, soccer has certainly seen its fair share of coverage in North American PC gaming. The latest company to hit the pitch is Microsoft with *International Soccer 2000*, a game designed by veteran British "footy" developer Rage Software.

The good news? *IS2000* plays so well, looks so good, and is priced so low that it may be the first title ever to stake a permanent claim in a territory long dominated by EA Sports' stunning FIFA series. The bad news? The game lacks many of FIFA's amenities and is hampered by being yet another Microsoft "budget" sport offering.

Does that make for less than believable soccer? Not on your life. In fact, when compared directly with FIFA, *IS2000* provides an arguably subtler, more realistic experience. Gamepad commands are occasionally misread or delayed, and the game has a tendency to instill temporary blasts of superhuman AI skill, but most everything else is top-notch.

Fair warning, though: I've never been convinced by the FIFA series' gameplay. As beautiful as it has always looked and as much fun as it has been to play, there has always been a pinball-esque quality to the action.

The Rage adaptation of soccer doesn't involve killer tackles, ping-pong ball action, or rocket-cannon blasts. In this game, players are, well, human — scaled realistically to the dimensions of the pitch, losing the ball of their own volition, and attempting passes that may well elude their intended target. Of particular note is *IS2000*'s unique take on difficulty adjustments, wherein AI opponent skill can be increased without necessarily submitting to the FIFA-style "fast, faster, fastest" philosophy.



The rosters may be made up of imaginary players, but teams such as Brazil and Argentina are as tough as in the real world.

Purists, however, may be disappointed that Microsoft didn't do more on the licensing front. In *IS2000*, the half-dozen "international" stadiums are equally divided between the genuine and the imagined, the 80-odd teams are of the generic international variety, and the players that stock those teams sport authentic names only when altered by the user. And if you're into facts and figures, you'd best know that *IS2000* offers nothing other than a scant few post-game team statistics, leaving player and in-depth cumulative data to its pricier EA peer.



International Soccer 2000 is fashioned with numerous on-screen player prompts. Here, a French player mulls over his options for a throw-in.

But everyone will appreciate the developer's attention to visuals. Quite simply, *IS2000*'s animations and detail quality is dang near as dazzling as that of the pricier *FIFA 2000* — right down to each unique player face, textured uniform and video-captured movement. Eight smartly positioned, fully zoomable cameras are ready to capture all the action, as are Brit announcers Ron Atkinson and Jonathan Pearce who somehow fight their way through a brutally mundane script to add energy and convincing aural drama to key on-field moments.

It's certainly a marvelous debut much in the manner of Microsoft's fledgling *NFL Fever* football game, and it wouldn't take much to break *International Soccer* from its budget shackles and really take a run at *FIFA*. I personally hope for just such a development in next year's version.

–Gordon Goble

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

80%

HIGHS: Realistic gameplay; eye-popping animations; rock-bottom price.

LOWS: No stats; fictional teams; intermittent control issues.

BOTTOM LINE: Microsoft will have EA Sports sweating with this fine "budget" soccer debut. With a little work, this could be a real contender.

www.DailyRadar.com

Swamp Buggy Racing

CATEGORY: Very bad racing **DEVELOPER:** Daylight Productions, Inc. **PUBLISHER:** WizardWorks, (800) 229-2714 ext. 3, *www.wizworks.com* **REQUIRED:** P233, 16MB RAM, 50MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** Store with good return policy **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

You think you've played bad games before? You ain't seen *nothin'*, Sparky.

If you stripped yourself naked, smeared your body with honey, duct-taped raw steaks to your ass, and jumped into a cage filled with rabid grizzly bears, I can almost guarantee you'd be having more fun than if you were playing *Swamp Buggy Racing*. I'm serious.

I know that we're not supposed to expect much from WizardWorks — after all, this is a company that regularly ships games that look like (and in many cases have) been cobbled together in a matter of hours — but even by this company's paleolithic standards, this one's a stinker.

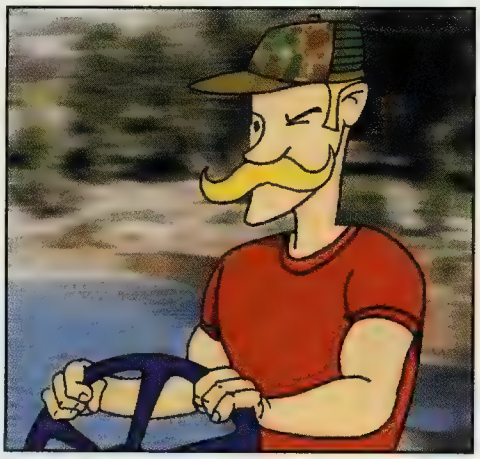
As its name suggests, *Swamp Buggy Racing* is all about the obscure sport of driving souped-up milk trucks through soggy marshes. That's *two* soggy marshes, to be exact — one short oval track and one quasi-short, quasi-oval track. Your garage contains a whopping four buggies of varying performance, handling ability, and butt-ugly aesthetics. Thanks to the limited number of vehicles and racing stages, I felt like I was playing a demo version of a game — actually, if there *was* a demo of *this*, it'd probably consist solely of the title and options screen.

After you watch the most poorly animated cutscene in the history of modern gaming, you get to race competitively or practice by yourself. If you place in the top two in the championship race, you move on to another race, where you go up against a single competitor. The winner of this one-on-one showdown is dubbed the King of the Swamp, and is treated to the second most poorly animated cutscene in the history of modern gaming. After this, the sensible gamer will remove the CD from the drive and promptly immolate it.



This buggy's body floats six inches above the actual suspension, thanks to the driver's incredible telekinetic powers. The game's physics are absolutely atrocious.

In order to save time and money, the developers licensed a racing game engine from Kalisto to power the swamp-stomping, um, action. While Kalisto is a competent group of coders, the developers of *Swamp Buggy Racing* are very obviously not. Let's start with the gameplay and physics (or lack thereof). You'll be driving along, and then you suddenly appear five feet ahead of yourself, or shift a few inches to the right or left. I have no rational explanation for this behavior. Nor can I elucidate on the game's collision detection, which "pops" your car into completely random positions whenever you bump against a wall. And since the track design is as badly premeditated as Dennis Rodman's marriage, you may find yourself wedged between pieces of track geometry at the most inopportune times, and forced to wait for the funky physics to throw you back on the road.



Here's a fine example of the quality cutscenes you'll be enjoying in between races. Oh, dear.

At least one aspect of *Swamp Buggy Racing* is salvageable; when loaded into a CD player and cranked up, the game's audio tracks — an eclectic mix of accordion and saxophone music — do a noteworthy job of repelling uninvited guests, such as adamant Jehovah's Witnesses or Flowbee salesmen. And the absence of multiplayer modes is actually a plus in this case; if I asked *my* geeky-ass buddies to play this game with me, I doubt they'd ever talk to me again.

The bottom line is this: *Swamp Buggy Racing* is one of the most inexplicably bad pieces of software ever mass-produced for the consumer market. Do not buy it. Do not rent it. *Do not even pick up the box.* I'm going to go launch the game one last time to get screenshots for this review, and after that, I'll be giving the game disc to the four-year-old who lives downstairs so he can turn it into a colorful Frisbee. Let's pretend that this never happened. Shame on you, WizardWorks.

–Colin Williamson

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

6%

HIGHS: Swamp enthusiasts may like the swamps.

LOWS: Graphics; sound; music; physics; gameplay; tracks; cars; cutscenes.

BOTTOM LINE: Photocopy this review, and Scotch-tape it to all the *Swamp Buggy Racing* boxes you can find within a 50-mile radius.

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Battle of Tatooine

EXALTED HERO OR FORGETTABLE

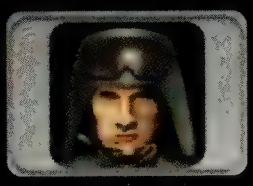
That heavy feeling on your shoulders is called the burden of command. Get used to it. With real-time ground

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB



General Veers

Served: Battle of Yavin, Battle of Sarapin, Battle of Ruul, Battle of Hoth (wounded), Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (captured).



2nd Lieutenant Gorga

Served: Battle of Yavin (wounded), Battle of Hoth, Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (killed).



Sergeant Krung

Served: Battle of Hoth, Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (missing in action).



Sergeant Major Corillon

Served: Battle of Yavin (wounded), Battle of Sarapin (wounded), Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (killed).



Lieutenant Major Antilles

Served: Battle of Yavin, Battle of Sarapin, Battle of Ruul (wounded), Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (wounded).



1st Lieutenant Spiker

Served: Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (promoted).

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Formula One 99

CATEGORY: Racing **DEVELOPER:** Studio 33 **PUBLISHER:** Psygnosis, (800) GET-PSYG, *www.psygnosis.com* **REQUIRED:** P166 (P233 for multiplayer), 32MB RAM, 40MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** P233, 64MB RAM, 85MB hard-drive space **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, IPX, Max. players: 8

This is a formula for disappointing PC racing. Yep, that was a pun based on the game's title.

With Papyrus' retro *Grand Prix Legends* and UbiSoft's stunning *Monaco Grand Prix Racing Simulation 2* both just over a year old, and with the third in MicroProse' trend-setting World Circuit/Grand Prix series due before summer, is there really any room for another "realistic" PC-based Formula 1 simulation?

Probably not, and definitely not when that game happens to be Psygnosis' inept F1 pseudo-simulation *Formula One 99*.

Developed by the UK's Studio 33, the same folks responsible for 1999's mediocre CART title *Newman/Haas Racing*, *Formula One* is neither new or exciting, and labors under one of the most curious driving models since, well, *Newman/Haas*. It's obvious that something went very wrong when it was converted from its well-received PlayStation beginnings.

That said, the game is not completely without merit. Studio 33 has really gone to town with its FIA licensing deal, packing *Formula One* with virtually every driver and team and all 16 circuits — including Malaysia's new Sepang track — from the real-life 1999 season. It also managed to secure the services of excitable BBC commentator Murray Walker, who delivers his severely limited dialogue with enthusiastic high-pitched flair.

On the track, the game definitely benefits from all the authentic colors, corporate logos, and tracks. It's got great force-feedback effects, too. But compare it with its most obvious rival, UbiSoft's *Monaco Grand Prix Racing Simulation 2*, and you'll realize just what your eyes are missing. Why, for instance, did Studio 33 give us rear-view mirrors the size of bumblebees? Why didn't they implement a fully functional cockpit or a true driver's-eye perspective? What about a little more clarity or more detail in the otherwise drab and chunky cars and trackside scenery? And why, in this day and age, won't the game let you drive under your own name?



Formula One 99 **features relatively credible depictions of 1999 F1 circuits, including a dull look at Malaysia's new Sepang track.**

The all-important steering response has absolutely no dead zone. Using a wheel removes some of the danger, and choosing the optional "arcade" mode launches a fast and perhaps overly simplistic action experience, but why the developer didn't institute some sort of controller sensitivity or brake bias adjustment for joysticks is beyond me.

And if that isn't disheartening enough, think how you'll feel when you see your strangely inconsistent AI competitors zipping through turns as if they were on rails. Heck, I got so steamed that I rammed one dude from behind, only to see him time-warp a hundred yards down the track in one of the most bizarre displays of "simulation" physics I'd ever seen. And that, in turn, made me so damn mad that I drove nose first into a wall at 200 mph just to watch myself blow up, only to discover that Formula One cars *don't* blow up. Heck, they rarely even bend, even with the "damage" option switched on. Grrr.

But don't think your frustration will be confined to the track. *Formula One*'s menu interface configuration is one of the worst in the business, with a decidedly down-scale appearance and seriously clumsy layout.

As a final indication of just how little play-testing went into this game, the upshift and downshift assignments in the control options sub-menu are actually reversed from their gameplay configuration! That's right, you'd best pick your downshift as your up and vice versa or suffer the consequences.

With excellent F1 alternatives from Papyrus and UbiSoft, there's no way *Formula One 99* can be recommended.

—Gordon Goble



Though drafting has little effect on the outcome in the speedy and none-too-realistic *Formula One 99* world, it still feels cool to line up behind another car and pretend.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Authentic look; solid force-feedback; okay driving experience with a wheel.

40%

LOWS: Suicidal joystick response; lousy interfaces; no vehicle damage; erratic AI drivers.

BOTTOM LINE: The masters of this genre have little to fear from this spinout of a game.

www.DailyRadar.com

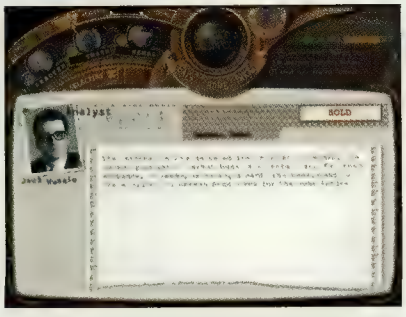
Wall Street Trader 2000

CATEGORY: Business simulation **DEVELOPER:** Monte Cristo Multimedia **PUBLISHER:** Interplay, (800) INTERPLAY, *www.interplay.com* **REQUIRED:** P90, 16MB RAM, 30MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** P166, 64MB RAM, SVGA video card with at least 4MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Modem, IPX, Max. players: 4

It might not be the ultimate business sim, but it's simple enough to satisfy.

Who doesn't want to earn cash in a bullish stock market sitting in front of the computer in his PJs? I've been known to dabble, and while online games at places such as E*Trade and Sandbox.com offer detailed trading sims, they don't have the graphical style or underhanded options that eke out a niche for *Wall Street Trader 2000* (*Trader*). For those unfamiliar with the doings of Wall Street, just the thought of keeping track not only of stock prices but also of the world events that control them is enough to bring on a mild panic attack. But thanks to an interface that's easier to use than most new cell phones, *Trader* pulls off the enviable feat of satisfying both would-be Wall Street wizards as well as grizzled pros of the financial arena.

What keeps *Trader* from becoming little more than a glorified spreadsheet is its keep-it-simple approach. When the game opens, you've been chosen for a little test by the eccentric but ridiculously rich Lord Fleming: use the cash he gives you and try to make a profit by investing in only two commodities, oil barrels and currency (only the Japanese yen at the start of the game). Oh, I forgot to mention that Wall Street is crumbling and the good Fleming thinks you might just have the financial know-how and moxie to save one of his major assets. By paying close attention to news reports, especially any events that may affect the supply of oil or Japan's economy, you set out to follow the golden rule of stock-market success: buy low and sell high.



You can hire advisors to investigate financial markets, but sometimes your investment buys you little more than hot air.



No, it doesn't belong to Dr. Who — it's the hand-held computer that Lord Fleming used to help build his fortune. Now it's yours, and you'd better learn to use it wisely.



A glance at this chart shows how your portfolio stacks up against your competitors.

Provided you make a bit of money for the old man, you're next tossed into a competition against three other Wall Street sharks lasting three months. The employee whose portfolio is worth the least at the end of three months is ejected from the running — and whoever finishes with the most impressive performance by year's end becomes Lord Fleming's successor.

Nice little side story, but the attraction — and addictive quality — of *Trader* is in its smooth learning curve. After mastering the basics of commodities trading, your next challenge is to invest in actual stock markets on a gradual basis, starting with the Dow Jones and the Nikkei, then others like the DAX being added as new currencies become available for purchase. Financial masters looking for complex nuts-and-bolts stock-market simulation might be disappointed to know there are only a handful of individual companies — divided into sectors such as Oil, Videogames, Food, Aeronautics, Tourism, and so forth — in which to invest, and these only pop up in clusters in the latter half of the game.

But there's plenty of breaking information to stay on top of through news and radio reports, and information you can purchase from analysts and industry insiders. Too bad the analysts here are often just as vague and imprecise as in real life — and if you're not cautious you might get nabbed using insider information and find yourself broken and broke in some rat-trap of a jail. Invest wisely and you'll be rewarded with several cool perks: the ability to hire spies to get the lowdown on your competitors (and perform counter-espionage against their attempts to get the goods on you!), retain a lawyer to get you out of comprising situations, and even launch a hostile takeover to grab all of an opponent's holdings.

All this detail only emerges in the long haul, and this is one area *Trader* doesn't earn top marks. A game played at average speed can take an hour or more to play, but that's no biggie since you can save at any time. That's assuming, of course, that you don't grow tired of the samey-same gameplay, and start searching for some human foes. Yes, you can play via modem, IPX, or even over a TCP/IP Internet connection, with the obvious potential for devious back-biting, but the lack of match-making makes finding opponents a tough proposition.

Monte Cristo has come up with a fun stock-market sim accessible to everyone — very appropriate, since it seems the entire world is day-trading now. If the company can find some way to get owners together for some truly hard-boiled financial brinkmanship, *Trader* might develop quite a cult following.

—Stephen Poole

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

75%

HIGHS: Compact and efficient interface; finely paced gameplay; and a host of tutorials.

LOWS: The single-player mode grows tiresome; lack of any official match-making support.

BOTTOM LINE: Draws you quickly into the world of finance and stocks, but gets old fast.

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Teen Digital Diva II

CATEGORY: Condescension **DEVELOPER:** Girl Games **PUBLISHER:** Activision, (800) 477-3650, *www.activision.com* **REQUIRED:** P166, 32MB RAM, 190MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** Activision get out of the budget software business **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

Teenage girls the world over should be offended by Activision's dismal "girl-gadget."

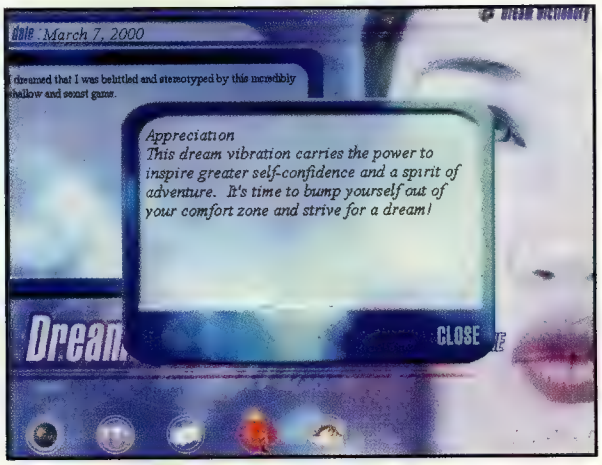
Early this winter, my body began to change. As I reached puberty, my hormones kicked in and a sudden infusion of estrogen from my pituitary gland signalled my upcoming change from girlhood to womanhood. Yippee! Now I can look forward to several years of moping over boys, spending endless hours preening in front of a mirror, and consulting horoscopes for clues about my future. Thanks for all the guidance, *Teen Magazine*!

Teen Magazine is the license behind Activision's *Teen Digital Diva II*, which my mom bought me because I am a teenage girl and it is one of the only pieces of entertainment software available for the huge and growing market that I represent. *Teen Digital Diva II* is a self-described "Cosmic Guide and Journal," which isn't much more than a collection of sexist and condescending mini-applications like the Karmic Connection (where I see if I'm cosmically compatible with others), the Dream Oracle (which interprets my dreams with all the insight of a magic eight-ball), and Daily Fortunes (which are basically fortune cookie messages).

Activision must have expected me to say "Wowie yipper-skippers!" when I saw the pathetic choice of things to do. But in reality, I almost hurled. This is a terrible program. It's not fit for small children, let alone high schoolers. Forgetting for a moment the inherently insulting tone of the whole "cosmic/karmic/astrological" schtick, let's just take a look at the mini-apps themselves.

The main draw is the Mystical Makeover, which allows you to import digital photos of yourself and then give yourself a makeover using a *very* limited palette of hair styles, tops, jewelry, and temporary tattoos. It's a painfully slow process, as everything takes a million years to load, and then it takes about ten minutes to steer the photo properly in the model frame to get the makeover started (and it still looks terrible, because there's no way to make your digital photo exactly fit the frame).

The Dream Oracle is laughable. You type your dream into a text window, and the program spews back some random remark. For example, I typed in "I dreamed that I was belittled and stereotyped by this incredibly shallow and sexist game," and the game's interpretation was: "This dream vibration carries the power to inspire greater self-confidence and a spirit of adventure. It's time to bump yourself out of your comfort zone and strive for a dream!"



Thanks for the nice dream interpretation. This game couldn't be any more disheartening for a young girl looking for guidance.

Actually, dumb-asses, that's a pretty piss-poor interpretation of the dream I typed in.

The Karmic Connection and Daily Fortunes are equally wrong-headed. The really dumb thing is this: I read *YM* and it's a fun and empowering magazine for teenage girls, if not particularly high-brow. Why does *Teen Digital Diva II* feel the need to portray a teenage girl's life in such cynically short-sighted terms?

The package includes the original product, which offers a half-baked "Create Your Own Magazine" feature that's more work than it is fun. The whole thing is a waste of money at any budget price.

What's so hard about designing fun games for teenage girls? Why does it all have to be such condescending poop? No wonder girls avoid the PC gaming market...products like *Teen Digital Diva II* send a clear signal that the industry just doesn't get us.

—Danielle Morris

NO! GOD, NO.

Here's what you get when three *PC Gamer* editors get the *Teen Digital Diva II* Mystical Makeover. We can't wait to be asked to the junior prom!



PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

16%

HIGHS: Rachel Leigh Cook is on the cover of the manual, and she was good in *She's All That*.

LOWS: Every one of the game's mini-applications.

BOTTOM LINE: If this is what it means to be a teen girl in the year 2000, then let's go back to jacks and hopscotch.

Virtual Pool Hall

CATEGORY: Sports **DEVELOPER:** Celeris **PUBLISHER:** Interplay, (949) 553-6678, *www.interplay.com* **REQUIRED:** P90, 16MB RAM, 20MB hard-drive space
WE RECOMMEND: P200, 32MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, Modem, IPX, TCP/IP, Max. players: 2

Pool games are just like buses, y'know. You wait for ages without seeing one, then three come along at once. This is the third, and likely final.

So here's a possible, almost probable scenario: Psygnosis releases its pool sim *Expert Pool* alongside THQ's *Ultimate 8-Ball*. They both seem to define the word "average" and really fail to bring anything new to the pool sim standard that was set by Interplay's *Virtual Pool 2* several years ago. Canny marketing executives at Interplay HQ read all the reviews of the two new games and notice a recurring theme — all the reviews refer reverentially to their own *Virtual Pool 2*. The click of the light bulb flash is almost audible — if these "new" games are essentially the venerable *VP2* in new clothing, why not just repackage *VP2*, slap in a couple of extra game options, and throw it out on the market adding "Still" to the tag line of "The Ultimate 3D Pool Simulator"? Brilliant.

"Hell," the marketing weenies ponder, "we don't even need to change the box much. Let's call it *Virtual Pool Hall*, referring to the veritable bounty of games now included, stick on a whopping big 'Guaranteed to improve your actual play' sticker to wow the punters, and ride the retro wave." Abso-bloody-lutely perfect.

Really, *Virtual Pool Hall* is a combination of the years-old *Virtual Pool 2* with the UK-released *Virtual Snooker*. So if you own either of these two products, you really might as well quit reading here and move on to the hilarous review of *Search for the Golden Dolphin*, since at least that game is new.

I've got to admit that initially I was almost enthusiastic to get hold of *VPH*. As a big pool fan, I was more than happy to give Interplay's pool sharks a day in court.

So it came as something of a shock when after a few games of pool into *VPH* that I started to become embittered. Sure, the same great physics were in evidence, and I even noticed areas where the developers had made improvements — such as in masse shots (swerving the cue ball around another ball by raising the cue butt and applying extreme English). But it was *exactly* the same. No style or atmosphere in the backdrops, dreadful music choices in all the Muzak, rock, and techno styles that I stomached before switching it off, no personality.



The rules of snooker are explained in the manual, but the subtleties are ignored.

Purely as a pool challenge, *VPH* certainly sports some excellent potting AI, but it hasn't really learned how to play snooker. While it follows the rules and pots the balls, even the highest-rated computer opponent on the hardest of the three difficulty settings made some ludicrous shot selections. The rating system that tracks your potting statistics for all the 21 game types (including four rule variations for eight-ball, and several billiard options) is still a very useful indicator of how you're playing, but doesn't really judge how you played during the game, only whether you won or lost. Sadly, while 128 AI players are listed, and rated with varying talents in areas such as potting, safety, positioning, etc., there isn't enough diversity among them to warrant the number. It would have been just as diverse with 30.

So what about that box's guarantee that it will improve your game? The physics are so accurate that if you think about your shots in the real pool hall using the same angle judgements, then I'd guess you could improve. But I'm better at real pool than I am at *Virtual Pool Hall* — if it makes my game worse, can I sue?

—Rob Smith



Follow Mike Sigel's video advice on all kinds of shots, then try them out. Lou Butera goes through trick shots, but with no explanation of actually how he does them.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

46%

HIGHS: Great physics; numerous game types.

LOWS: Four-year-old game; just terrible music; spurious guarantees.

BOTTOM LINE: Dig out that old copy of *VP2*, because there's nowhere near enough here to warrant a repurchase.

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Search For the Golden Dolphin

CATEGORY: Action-adventure **DEVELOPER:** Cinegram Media Inc. **PUBLISHER:** Digitial Treasures, (908) 598-4755, *www.cinegram.com* **REQUIRED:** P233, 32MB RAM, 150MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** Some type of trough to catch the resultant spew **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

Or, *How I Got My First Review for* PC Gamer *and it Damn Near Broke My Will to Live.*

Ah, the French. Combining snootiness, bad hygiene, and the unfortunate tendency to capitulate when a stiff wind blows through Paris, the French have carved themselves a powerful niche as the globe's laughingstocks. It's ultimately fitting (and certainly revelatory) that they serve as the foil in the gorgeously awful "interactive 3D adventure" *Search For the Golden Dolphin*.

A masterpiece of bad 3D graphics, this action-adventure lacks only two things: 1) action and 2) adventure. You play as Lt. Nathaniel Thorne, a sailor in the newly formed United States Navy, on a quest to hunt down and wrest back control of the U.S.S. *Golden Dolphin* from a privateer. The game is set in 1799, amid the backdrop of the pseudo war waged in the West Indies between this fledgling sea force and the hated French.

A simple first-person point-and-clicker (imagine *Myst* with lisping pirates), this historical farce plays out in eight separate "interactive 3D adventures," each more banal and pointless than the last.

"To rescue the ship," the game's box text reads, "you'll have to master nautical skills, solve fiendishly clever puzzles, interact with a variety of colorful characters from scurvy salts to powdered dandies, while working your way up the ranks..." Only the twisted mind of a marketing shill would assume that hunting down a red flag could be a "fiendishly clever puzzle," or that pointing and clicking on one of the game's vacuous characters and listening to their incoherent ramblings qualifies as "interaction."

The unfortunate souls who buy this game will find themselves shlepping through poorly laid-out corridors hunting for trinkets and delivering them to characters. Nigh-incoherent voice acting adds a special touch to the festivities, and it's a sure bet that even the lobotomized will be able to identify the good characters from the scum-weasels. For some inexplicable reason, the evil-doers all lisp or speak in whispers that can only be overcome with a volume slider set to maximum. This takes some of the mystery out of the investigation.

Puzzles, which include running flags up a mast, operating a cannon, and navigating sea lanes, all tend to eschew any sort of creativity for simple point-and-click shenanigans. The terrible layout of the Golden Dolphin makes for a very confusing adventure. Stretches of gameplay become something more like *Search for the Way Out of This Hallway Somewhere Inside the Golden Dolphin*.

Static backgrounds littered with poorly rendered sailors (who all seem to be posed to show off their buttocks) make for some dreary exploration. A frustrating inventory system allows Thorne to carry only three items — count 'em, three — at one time, and it's not possible to shift items by dropping them. To suggest this game is an aberration that should be flushed is to horribly insult aberrations that should be flushed; hunt for the satin air-sickness bag before you search for the Golden Dolphin.

–Greg Orlando



Hand-picked for frumpiness and devoid of any sort of personality, this young woman's only saving grace is her bloody red cloth.



Fun Fact: The French, if given the chance, would gladly surrender to this salty sailor, the chest he's guarding and, we suspect, the waves.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: IQ loss is minimal and temporary; you get to embarrass the French.

15%

LOWS: Dreadful graphics; confusing layout; terrible inventory system; awful voice acting.

BOTTOM LINE: This game sleeps with the fishes in Davey Jones' locker.

1602 A.D.

CATEGORY: Strategy **DEVELOPER:** Sunflowers **PUBLISHER:** GT Interactive, (800) 610-4847, *www.gtgames.com* **REQUIRED:** P100, 16MB RAM, 120MB hard-drive space
WE RECOMMEND: PII 200, 32MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, Modem, IPX, TCP/IP, Max. players: 4

Here's another one of "those" historical god games, and not a terribly exciting one.

This real-time strategy game has sold scads of copies in Europe, which confirms my long-held belief that European gamers are easier to please than those in the U.K. and the U.S. Must be an existential thing. *(Or just a "not having a clue" thing — Ed.)* As I slogged my way through the tutorial (not so easy at first, because some basic terms are labeled differently in the manual than they are on the screen), a slow gray fog settled over my brain, and I heard a soporific refrain, as though Benedictine monks were chanting in my kitchen: "Intrepid shipload of explorers sets forth...finds islands with resources... builds settlement...sets up trade route...fills and empties warehouses ...makes/breaks treaties...wages generic warfare...Zzzzz."

I was briefly awakened from my stupor by the appearance of that most dreaded of data displays: The awful Warehouse/Inventory Screen, with its eye-repelling array of food groups, raw materials, and iron-mongery. *Oh God,* I moaned, *not again!*

Yes, dear readers, *1602 A.D.* is another one of "those" games. If you've already spent many hours watching the cute little buggers in *The Settlers,* or pondering the ennui-inducing diplomatic quirks of *Imperialism,* and the colorful if maddeningly elusive economic fluctuations of *Caesar III,* you will instantly, and permanently, experience a lurching spasm of *déjà vu.*



Any experienced strategy player will instantly feel at home with *1602*'s interface and gameplay.

To be fair, *1602* does have its good points: each facility generates a "service area" within which it functions optimally; you don't have to explore every square foot of an island to find out what resources it holds; the mechanistic routines of trade can be set on "automatic"; there's a single-player editor that allows you — after an investment of considerable time and energy — to generate games that are marginally more entertaining than those concocted by the AI. Plus, the game's dirt-cheap.

Nothing appears to have been done to spiff up the graphics since the game first came out in Germany two years ago. They're okay, though not nearly as droll as those seen in *The Settlers,* and nowhere near as grand as in the *Caesar/Pharaoh* titles. The interface creaks along: functional but neither intuitive nor elegant. Being able to rotate the main map *is* helpful, but unfortunately, you can't do that (or anything else) with the minimalist strategic map — navigation on the seas is often more problematic than it was in the age of the sextant and the astrolabe.



The graphics don't seem to have been spiffed up since the game came out in Germany two years ago.

Supposedly, the AI adjusts to your skill level. If that's true, then I must be the world's lousiest strategy gamer; in virtually every game I played, the AI was lethargic and bizarrely passive. On the few occasions when I managed to provoke a state of war, nothing much happened.

This is one of those tough-to-call titles. It has few glaring faults; it does a reasonable job of providing the experience promised by the box copy, it's visually appealing, and if you really get off on loading, transporting, and selling lots of goods, you will find trade activity galore. The development/construction phase can, in fact, be entertaining (at least up to mid-game) in a *Sim City*-esque way. You could even call it "deep" if your definition of depth is a lenient one. If you haven't tried one of these empire-building games, and you want to see what it's all about without spending more than 30 bucks, you could do worse.

The fact that *1602* is derivative does not necessarily mean that it's *bad* (most good games *are* derivative to some extent). It's just that I, old-school reviewer that I am, found the whole package curiously inert and joyless, lacking the creative sparks that can redeem even the most formulaic games.

–William R. Trotter

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

57%

HIGHS: It looks pretty; it'll run fine on any PC manufactured since the days of vacuum tubes.

LOWS: Euro-crap interface; tedious; cowardly AI.

BOTTOM LINE: It's okay for novices, but almost every other empire-building title in print offers more flash and substance.

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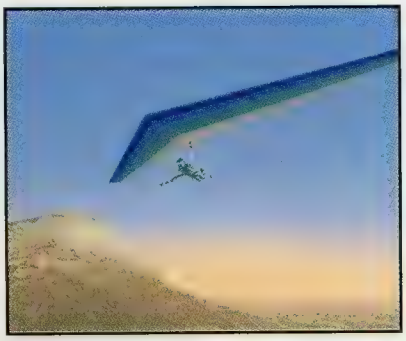
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Hangsim

CATEGORY: Flight Sim **DEVELOPER:** Wilco Publishing **PUBLISHER:** Wilco Publishing, *www.wilcopub.com*
REQUIRED: P166, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard-drive space, Direct3D-compatible accelerator card
WE RECOMMEND: PII 300, 64MB RAM, 4MB 3D accelerator **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

There has been little attention paid to the popular realm of "light" aviation in PC games. Wilco hopes to fill that vacuum with *Hangsim*.

To that end, it's a highly realistic reproduction of what it is like to pilot a hang glider or paraglider. Desktop pilots, who already fancy themselves masters of aerodynamics, will be forced to go back to the basics and remember what got them up in the air in the first place. *Hangsim* does a fine job of recreating the quiet challenge of remaining aloft, relying purely on your senses. Forget about barrel rolls and start learning to read the geography of the land and listen to the wind across your wings in order to pick up thermals or avoid the dangerous turbulence of a down slope.



Who needs jets and missiles when you can enjoy the simple pleasure of a hang glide?

Although the game does a wonderful job with micro-meteorology, it isn't a uniformly successful title. The graphics are fairly realistic from a significant altitude, but since much of the game is played below 1,000 feet, the ground becomes pixelated. There are bugs, too. Some scenarios strangely begin with you about to plow into the ground, and the game runs choppily even on a system well above the minimum specs. But for general aviation enthusiasts who are looking for a title that really gets them back to the basics, *Hangsim* is a decent refresher.

—Jim Preston

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT 57%

Jugular Street Luge Racing

CATEGORY: Sports **DEVELOPER:** Fusion Interactive **PUBLISHER:** HeadGames Publishing; (612) 942-5202, *www.headgames.net* **REQUIRED:** P200, 32MB RAM, 155MB hard-drive space
WE RECOMMEND: PII 266, 64MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

Just when it seems they've run out of ideas for new "extreme" franchises comes another "extreme" sport from HeadGames. This time around, they're taking it lying down.

In *Jugular Street Luge Racing*, a game dedicated to the highly illegal sport of street luge, you lie back on a skateboard-like apparatus and race downhill against other AI opponents at speeds exceeding 80 miles per hour. As if this isn't dangerous enough, there are countless obstacles, such as traffic, pedestrians, police blockades, and other luge racers.

For the most part, *Jugular Street Luge Racing* delivers a real sense of speed, and the 3D graphics are pretty impressive, especially for a value-priced HeadGames product.

There are two modes in the game: a single-race "Practice" mode to sharpen skills (the option for a pre-race fly-by preview of each track is highly recommended) and a "Season" mode, where you travel across the country to compete in varied events. Qualify for a race, and the sponsors offer money for a number of upgrades.



There's a reason why this activity is illegal, kids. Let this be a lesson to you.

So, while the game is a first of its kind *(which is something any HeadGames title can claim —Ed.)*, is it any fun? Believe it or not, it is — but only for a little while. Extreme athlete wannabes will likely get their $19.99 worth.

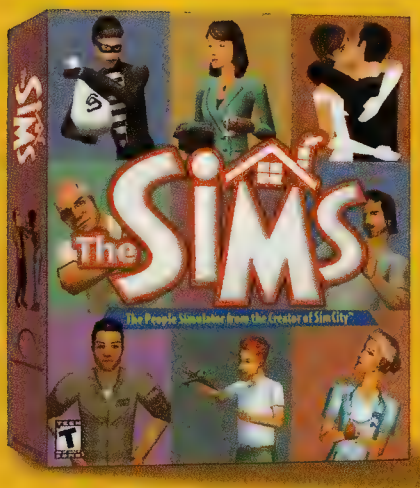
–Marc Saltzman

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT 61%



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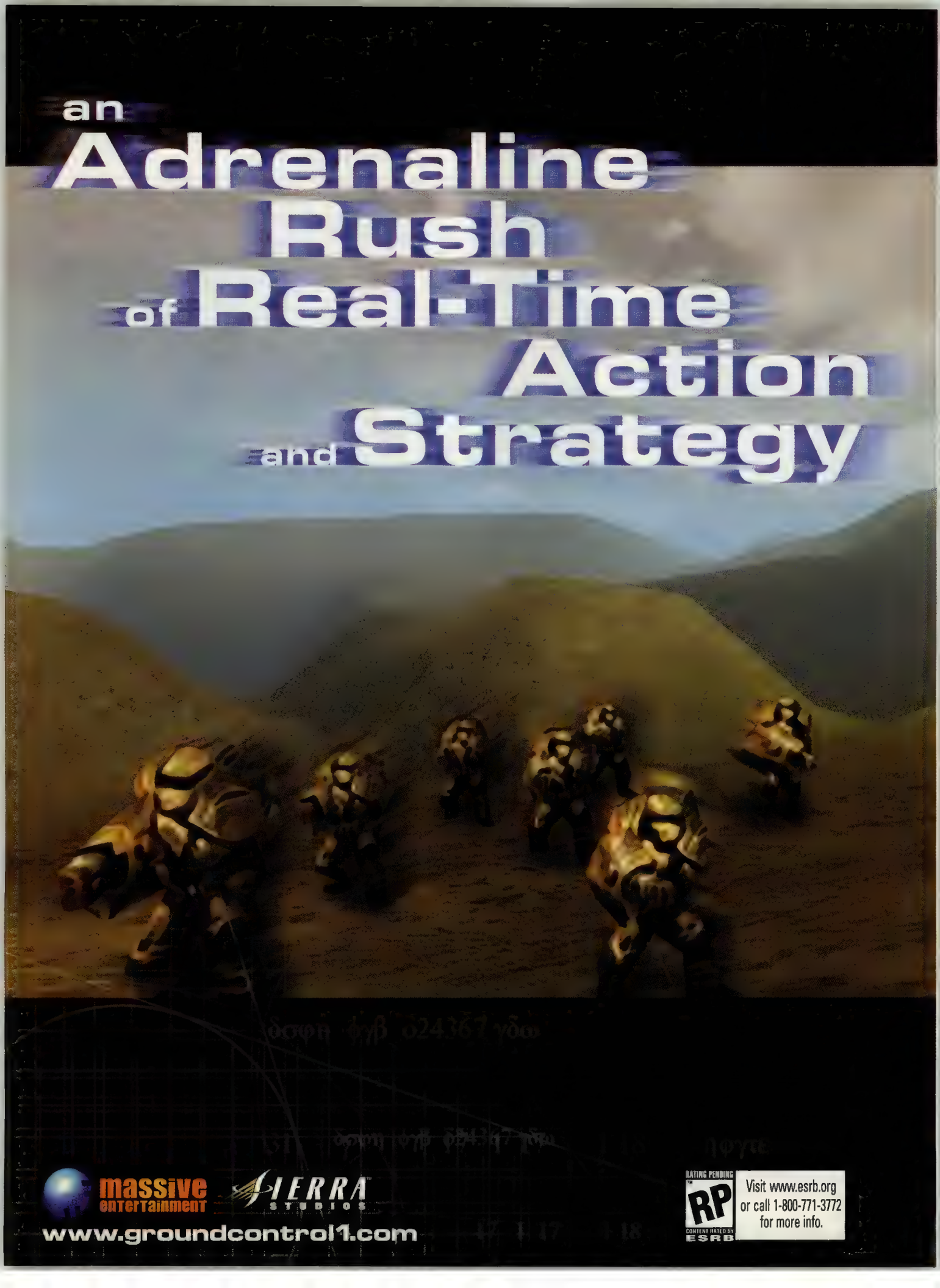


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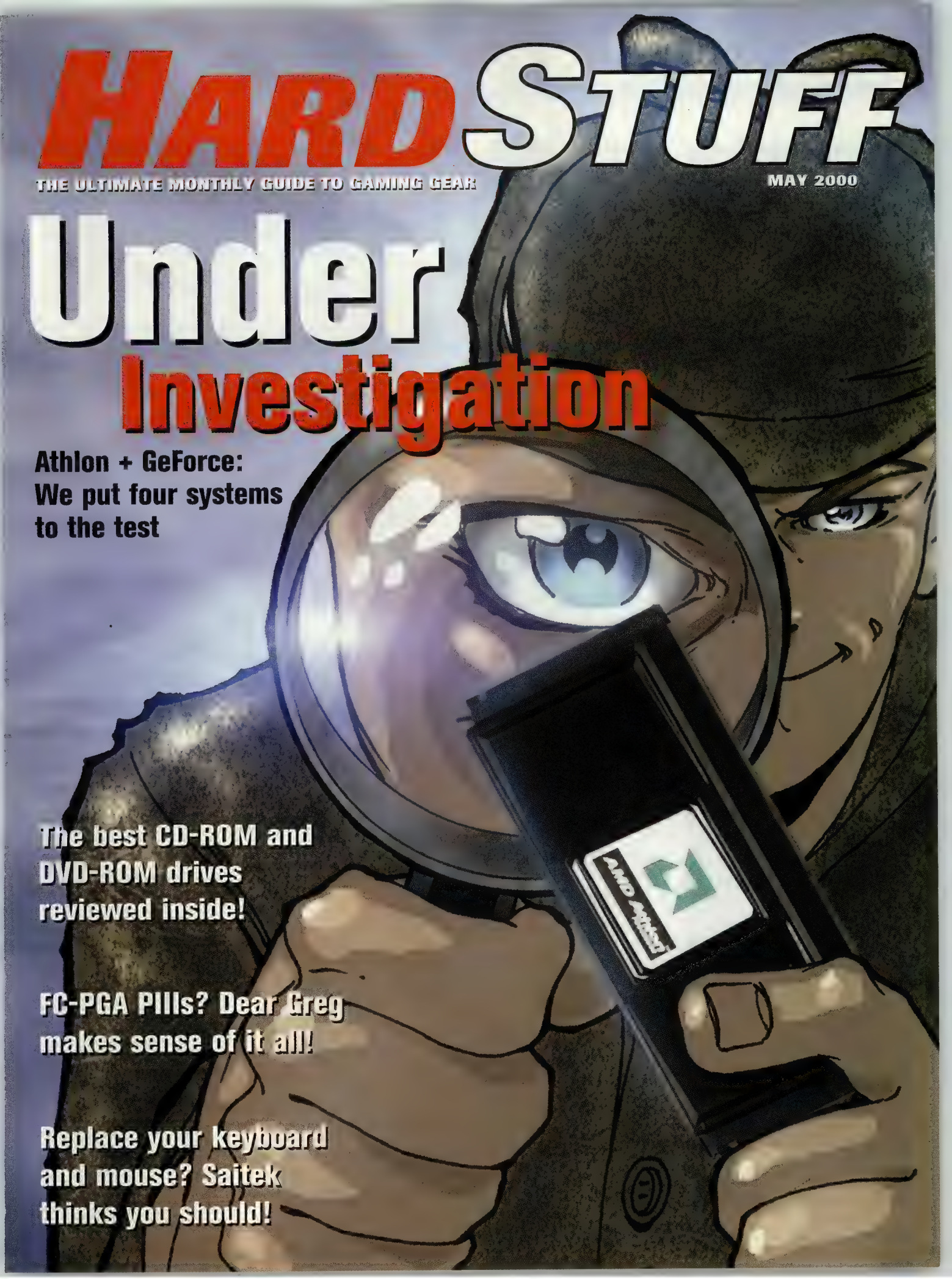
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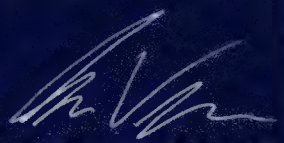
HSCONTENTS

"Trinity?" "Yes, Neo?"



Just as Neo was looking for Trinity in *The Matrix* (okay, he was actually looking for Morpheus, but I'm desperately trying to tie my line of B.S. together here people, so just go with me), so too are you probably looking for Trinity. Although in this case, it's the Trinity page you're searching for, not the babealicious hottie from the film. You know, Trinity — the page where *PC Gamer* recommends components for low, mid, and high-end systems? Anyway, we've gotten rid of it this month — thrown it right out the door onto its ass. Why you ask? Well, it certainly isn't gone for good. Heck no! — it's simply hanging back so we can make some changes.

See, since space tends to be limited here at the Hard Stuff, I've recently been scratching my head trying to figure out how I could get some extra room to review more products, talk about more new technology, and to make the HS even better and more funner (most funnest?) than it is today. What I and some of the other people in the magazine have come up with is a way of integrating the contents page (yes, the very same page you're reading right now) and the Trinity page into one — thereby giving me an extra page each month that I can fill with added content. If all goes according to plan, expect to see the new page right here next month. Until then, sleep well knowing that Trinity will soon be making a triumphant return.



Greg Vederman, technical editor

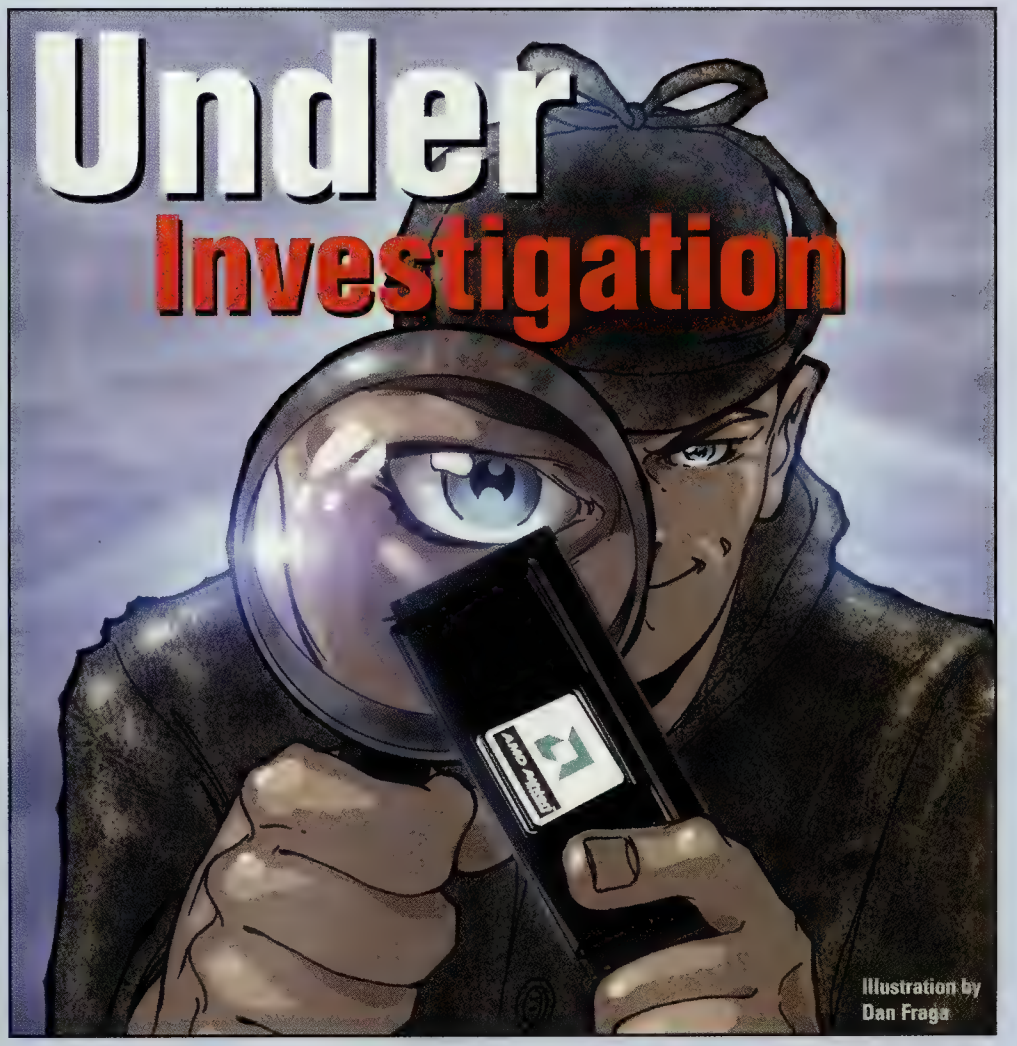


Illustration by Dan Frage

AMD's Athlon processor is fast, but is building a computer with one worth the headaches? We've built four systems using four big-name Athlon motherboards with GeForce graphics cards, and we're going to tell you exactly what we learned.. **PAGE 114**

REVIEWS

- ***KENWOOD 72X TRUE-X CD-ROM DRIVE*** **PAGE 118**
 It's a little loud, but it just happens to be the fastest drive we've ever seen! Did we like it? You're going to have to read our review to find out!
- ***PIONEER DVD-114 DVD-ROM KIT*** **PAGE 118**
 Pioneer can do no wrong. Building on the success of its 6X DVD-ROM drive, the DVD-114 is a movie watcher's dream.
- ***SAITEK GM2 ACTION PAD AND MOUSE*** **PAGE 119**
 Could it be? A controller other than a mouse and keyboard that's actually good for playing 3D games?

How We Rate the Hard Stuff

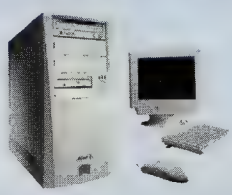
You've been around long enough to know the greatest technology doesn't mean a thing unless it improves the games you love to play. Our reviews focus on real-world testing, but when a number is in order for comparisons, we use the benchmarking tools developed by our hardware-frenzied sister publication *Maximum PC*. Between our testing and the BenchMarks, we'll give you the lowdown on which devices perform and which ones fizzle.

PC Gamer's Editors' Choice Awards

Every month, we honor the best peripherals, utilities, and hardware we test with our Editors' Choice award. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on hardware at a local computer store, you can be sure it's among the best.

TECH Q&A

Are there Pentium IIIs that look like Celerons? If so, can they be placed in regular PIII motherboards? And why is that Vederman guy so cool? **PAGE 120**



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Athlon and GeForce:

A match made in heaven...or hell?

These days, nary an hour passes without some concerned reader sending us E-mail in regards to the AMD Athlon. It seems that everyone online has been bombarded with one report after another about how the Athlon doesn't seem to be fully compatible with NVIDIA's cutting edge GeForce accelerator. "Is it true?" they ask. And for some time now, the Hard Stuff stock reply was: "Yeah, pretty much." But we wanted to find out if anything had changed since we last tested Athlon systems. To that end, we journeyed down to our local computer shop and purchased four popular Athlon motherboards to see if we could succeed where others had failed. How did we make out? That's what we're here to tell you!

HERE'S HOW WE TESTED:

Each test was run using the exact same hardware and cabling (with the exception of the A-Bit BX6/PIII 450MHz combo we tested for comparison's sake, which used standard IDE cables).

Those parts were:

1. Athlon 550MHz CPU
2. Three 128MB PC-133 DIMMs from Micron (brand name/ OEM memory)
 a. If all three Micron DIMMs failed, tried one 128MB PC-100 DIMM from Apacer
3. Diamond MX400 sound card (brand — not model — AMD recommended)
4. Guillemot 3D Prophet SDR (GeForce)
5. Maxtor DiamondMax VL 8.7GB hard drive (brand — not model — AMD recommended)
6. Kenwood 72x True-X CD-ROM drive (brand — not model — AMD recommended)
7. Hard drive and CD-ROM connected to motherboard with UDMA66 cables (non-UDMA cables used in PIII system)
8. Mitsumi 1.44" floppy drive
9. Antec PP-303x 300 watt Power Supply (AMD recommended)
10. KeyTronic 104 keyboard (PS/2 — AMD recommended)
11. Microsoft Wheel Mouse (PS/2 — AMD recommended)

MOTHERBOARDS TESTED:

- FIC SD11 Rev. 1.8 (AMD recommended)
- MicroStar 6167 1.0 (AMD recommended)
- Biostar K7MKA 1.0b (AMD recommended)
- Asus K7M Rev. 1.04
- A-Bit BX6 (PIII motherboard)

	MICROSTAR 6167	BIOSTAR M7MKA	ASUS K7M	FIC SD11
Format C: drive	✓	✓	✓	✓
Install Windows 98	✓	✗ [3]	✓	✓
Install AMD AGP miniport driver 4.61 (followed by restart)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Install AMD IDE bus master driver 1.24 (followed by restart)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Install WinZip 7	✓	✓	✓	✓
Install DirectX 7a	✓	✓	✓	✓
Install GeForce Detonator drivers v3.68 (followed by restart)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Install MX400 drivers	✗ [1]	✓	✓	✓
Install 3Dmark 2000 Pro (followed by restart)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Install Quake III	✗ [2]	✓	✓	✓
Install batch file that allows Q3V demos to loop indefinitely	✓	✓	✓	✓
Install *Quake II*	✓	✓	✓	✓

NOTES

1. Blue screen of death in the middle of install program. Going into device manager and pointing "Update Driver" to the location of the driver on Diamond's CC does the job. Restart.

2. Hard Lock. At this point we decided to start removing RAM in an effort to stop the crashes. After shutting down and removing the module from DIMM 3 (leaving 256MB in the system), *Quake III* runs fine. So, too, does Diamond's install MX400 program. Restart.

3. Blue screen of death during Windows install. Reformatted drive and started over without third DIMM. With only two DIMMS in first two DIMM slots Windows was then installed without a hitch.



ABOUT THE TESTS WE RAN:

• *Quake III* (OpenGL, 1024x768x32-bit color with all effects maxed out): Because we wanted to drive these systems hard, we used a batch file that makes *Quake III*'s gameplay demos loop continuously as fast as the system can run them (by using the "timedemo 1" command). In practice, likely due to a bug within *QIII*, this test doesn't ever run for more than an hour or so on any system — Intel or AMD-based (regardless of which video card is used) — without crashing back to the Windows desktop with a very predictable "out of memory" type error. What we were going for here was to see if the Athlon would crash out early, and with unpredictable errors.

• *Quake II* (OpenGL, 1024x768x16-bit color): Similar in nature to what we were doing with *Quake III*, this time we simply let the game loop its own demos continuously at normal speed to try and imitate, as best we could, a normal single-player experience.

• 3DMark 2000 Pro (D3D, 1024x768x32-bit color, 32-bit textures, 24-bit Z, triple frame buffer, using D3D hardware T&L): A benchmarking utility we generally use when testing out new video cards, we wanted to use 3DMark because it is very 3D intensive (it drives 3D cards hard and fast) and because we could set it to loop continuously.

HERE'S WHAT WE DID AND WHAT HAPPENED WITH EACH OF THE FOUR ATHLON MOTHERBOARDS:

MICROSTAR 6167

• Run *Quake III* for one hour or until expected crash — passed. Game ran for about an hour and then crashed out in expected manner (as do all stable systems).

• Run 3Dmark 2000 benchmark 6 times in a row without break (approx. one hour) — **FAILED.** 3DMark repeatedly drops back out to Windows desktop without causing system crash after approximately 45 minutes. Tried removing module from DIMM 2 (leaving 128MB in the system), but still dropped back to Windows. Removed last Micron DIMM and sound card, and then replaced memory with 128MB Apacer DIMM, but still dropped back to Windows after a brief period of time.

• Run *Quake II* for one hour — passed.

BIOSTAR M7MKA

• Run *Quake III* for one hour or until expected crash — **FAILED.** System hard locks right as the game is about to start. It turns out that the AGP aperture size in the BIOS was set to a paltry 32MB. Bumped it up to 128MB, saved settings, and tried *Quake III* again. This time game runs for nearly 50 minutes before hard locking. Switching to Apacer 128MB DIMM instead of Micron DIMMs allows the game to run until expected (normal/passing) crash.

• Run 3Dmark 2000 benchmark 6 times in a row without break (approx. one hour) — **FAILED.** Drops back to desktop no matter which type (or configuration) of RAM used. Again, tried removing sound card, but crash keeps right on coming.

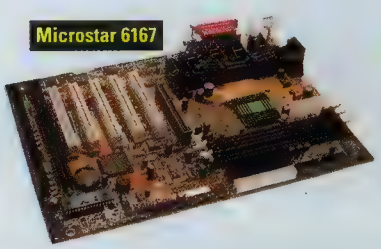
• Run *Quake II* for one hour — **FAILED.** Hard lock. No amount of switching things would prevent this.

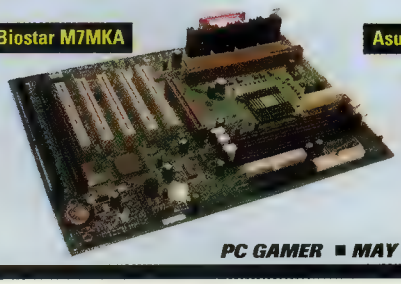
ASUS K7M

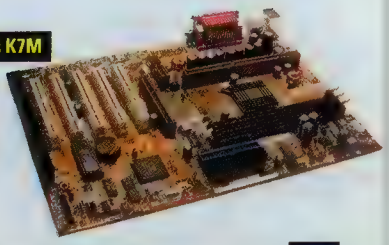
• Run *Quake III* for one hour or until expected crash — passed. Game ran for about an hour and then crashed out in expected manor (as do all stable systems).

• Run 3Dmark 2000 benchmark 6 times in a row without break (approx. one hour) — **FAILED.** Almost exactly like MS-6167 board. 3DMark repeatedly drops back out to Windows desktop without causing system crash after approximately 30 minutes. Tried removing module from DIMM 2 (leaving 128MB in the system), but still dropped back to Windows. Removed last Micron DIMM and sound card, and then replaced memory with 128MB Apacer DIMM, but still dropped back to Windows after a brief period of time.

• Run *Quake II* for one hour — passed.


Microstar 6167

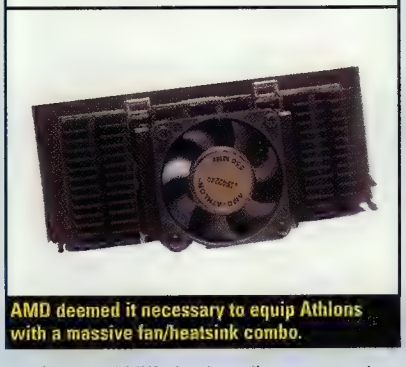

Biostar M7MKA


Asus K7M





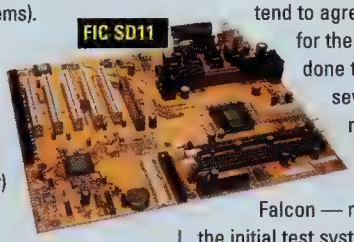




AMD deemed it necessary to equip Athlons with a massive fan/heatsink combo.

FIC SD11

• Run *Quake III* for one hour or until expected crash — passed. Game ran for about an hour and then crashed out in expected manor (as do all stable systems).



• Run 3Dmark 2000 benchmark 6 times in a row without break (approx. one hour) — passed. Then, when we tried to run this test again just to make sure we were looking at a stable system; you guessed it — it did eventually drop back out to Windows.

• Run *Quake II* for one hour — passed.

A-Bit BX6 with 450 MHz PIII

• All tests passed.

ANALYZING THE RESULTS

What did all of this testing show us? Well, for the most part, it highlights that Athlons and GeForces are a hard combination to get running well together — even with recommended hardware and NVIDIA's latest drivers. What troubled us most was the crashing out to Windows phenomenon that was evident in every Athlon board we tested. The PIII machine passed all of the tests with ease, and yet the Athlons consistently choked on 3Dmark. A problem with the benchmark, you say? Well, we'd tend to agree if it weren't for the fact that we've done this same test on several Athlon machines from companies like Alienware and Falcon — not to mention the initial test system that AMD sent us months ago — and they all passed. Our hunch is that many of the problems we encountered here simply came down to "silly" things like power supply (not enough juice) or RAM (differing brand) issues; "silly" only because it's silly to think that the average consumer is going to be able to track down all of the specific parts needed to get these systems running perfectly.



Here's one of the most crucial pieces in the puzzle; make certain that you're using high-quality, brand-name RAM.

If there's anything we've learned about Athlons up to this point, it is that they're damn near the most finicky computers in existence if you're building one yourself. Even if you don't go with a GeForce, building a stable system is anything but a simple task. In fact, the crashing out to Windows problem we experienced seems to be plaguing many Athlon users in many different games — even those without GeForce video card. Because of this, even though we don't traditionally review motherboards here at the Hard Stuff, expect us to keep testing until we can either get one of these four boards running without a hiccup, or until a better board comes along and makes these options obsolete.

Until then, if you're still planning on building an Athlon with a GeForce, make certain that the store you plan to shop at accepts returns and/or exchanges should you need to swap out parts such as RAM or power supplies. Better still, if possible, simply buy a complete Athlon system from a vendor like Alienware (*www.alienware-pc.com*) or Falcon Northwest (*www.falcon-nw.com*) — companies that have tested, re-tested, and tweaked until they've found the parts that work best with Athlon processors and motherboards.

Next month, we'll track down a bigger power supply and some new memory and try it all over again. Check these pages for an update on our progress.

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Kenwood,
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www.kenwoodtech.com

PRICE
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OTHER OPTIONS

See below for our review of Pioneer's new DVD-114 drive. While not a ZEN drive, it's still mighty fast (10X DVD/40X max CD). If you want a DVD player instead of a mere CD-ROM drive, that is the one to get. For even more details, head on over to Hi-Val's website at *www.hival.com*.

Okay, this is getting plum silly. A 72X CD-ROM drive? 10MB per second transfer rates? Less than 100ms random access times? Who needs this much power? Who needs this much speed? And more importantly, who needs to get a life? We do! We do!

Taking advantage of ZEN's True-X technology, Kenwood's newest drive doesn't hit 72X at its maximum — it *averages* it. Well, that's not entirely true. In our tests using the ever popular CD-TACH benchmarking program, we found the drive's true average to be 62.9X. Keep in mind, however, that this score is weighted, meaning that it takes into account the fact that while CD-ROM drives read fastest on the outer edges of a disc, most data actually resides closer to the inner edges and middle regions. Because of this, the score is "weighted" to illustrate what performance would be like when reading the average CD. At its best, the drive sped along as fast as 69.15X, and at its worst, it slowed to a "mere" 53.21X — and that ain't shabby at all. In fact, it makes this Kenwood drive the fastest CD-ROM drive we've tested to date.

How is this speed possible? Well, it's because ZEN's technology allows the laser to be split into seven separate beams, all reading different tracks. In turn, performance is increased while spin velocity is kept at a reasonable rate. This technology isn't all Pop Tarts and bubble gum, however; several of the older ZEN-based drives had difficulties running at full bore without a UDMA cable. Additionally, back in the day of the 40X True-X drive, reports of defective units were rampant. Because of this slightly sordid history, we put this drive through some serious hardcore testing, and we're happy to report that we didn't witness a single hitch. Any problems that Kenwood and ZEN might have had in the past seem to have been left behind. What's left over is the fastest CD-ROM drive on the market — one that can get a bit loud at times (thought we'd warn you ahead of time) — but one that we can wholeheartedly recommend.



FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Fastest CD-ROM drive you can buy; seems to have overcome the problems this company has had with past products.

LOWS Isn't quite as fast as the box proclaims; a bit loud.

BOTTOM LINE If you're building a new computer and aren't interested in a DVD-ROM drive, go for the Kenwood 72X CD-ROM drive.

PIONEER

DVD-114 Kit

COMPANY
Pioneer (sold and distributed through Hi-Val), (714) 953-3000,
www.hival.com

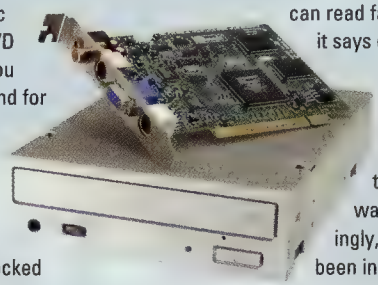
PRICE
$259 (Direct)

OTHER OPTIONS

If you don't want a DVD-ROM drive (we can't imagine why you'd want to deprive yourself, but hey, that's your decision), there's still something to be said for a super speedy CD-ROM drive. If you're looking for one of those, check out Kenwood's new 72X CD-ROM drive reviewed above. Talk about a screamer!

It wasn't so long ago that we were reviewing the Pioneer/Hi-Val masterpiece of a DVD-ROM drive, the DVD-103. That drive was a 6X DVD-ROM player that was one-half of a kit whose significant other was a Sigma Designs RealMagic Hollywood Plus DVD decoder card. If you read the review (and for those that haven't, we're going to tell you what we thought about it right now) you know that the kit rocked our world. This new kit, however, containing the same great Hollywood Plus card but with the addition of Pioneer's new DVD-114, is even better still.

Way back when the DVD-103 ruled the roost (several months ago can seem like the Stone Age when it comes to computer technology), having a DVD-ROM drive that purred along at an average speed of around 4.0X was mighty impressive. These days, with the DVD-114, DVDs are read at an average of 6.4X (a weighted average that is calculated using more inside tracks than outside tracks since most data on DVDs isn't all the way out on the edges where drives can read fastest). And true to what it says on the box, this drive spins up to 9.93X at its maximum — just a scant few hairs shy of 10X. Even at its slowest, the 114 still packs a wallop at 4.13X. Interestingly, CD-ROM speed hasn't been increased much over the DVD-103. While that drive maxed out at a little more than 33.1X, the DVD-114 is basically the same speed at 33.3X. Still, this isn't the end of the world, since its weighted average is a respectable 22.1X and random access speeds have dropped to a very low 76ms.



Bringing up the rear in this nifty little package is the always wonderful Hollywood Plus DVD decoder board. With this board, movies, be they on your PC monitor or TV, look as good as on any high-end home DVD player, and the card supports both analog and digital outs for listening on either a standard set of speakers or for plugging directly into an AC3 receiver.

So, should you upgrade to the DVD-114 if you've already got the DVD-103? Nah, you're fine with what you've got. If you've got an older DVD-ROM drive, however (one that maybe had difficulties reading burned media and the like), there's no better DVD drive than Pioneer's latest.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Fastest DVD-ROM drive in town and comes packaged with the best hardware DVD decoder available.

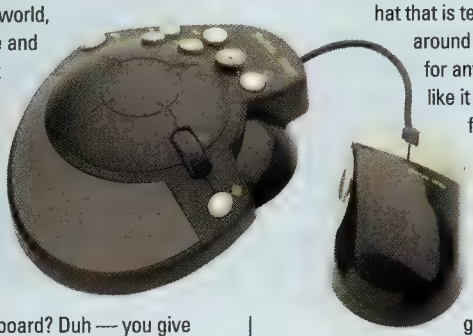
LOWS CD-ROM speed doesn't get close to its 40X max rating.

BOTTOM LINE A match made in heaven. If you still haven't jumped on the DVD bandwagon, now's your time, and this is your kit.

SAITEK

GM2 Action Pad and Mouse

After finally realizing that gamers simply aren't willing to replace their standard keyboard and mouse controls with any of the various and sundry first-person shooter gamepads and joysticks of the world, Saitek has gone and made a product that should have been thought up long ago. What do you give gamers that don't want to get rid of the mouse and keyboard? Duh — you give them a *better* mouse and keyboard! Yes, the GM2 is both a comfortable mouse *and* an ergonomic keyboard/gamepad emulator all in one nifty little package.



Looking and feeling a lot like the Microsoft Mouse Pro, the Game Mouse portion of the GM2 differs in that it adds a four-way hat switch that can be configured using Saitek's powerful programming software. The Action Pad portion of the GM2 sports six fully programmable buttons (plus a programmable shift button), a self-centering rotary wheel (which comes in very handy for circle strafing), and an eight-way hat that is terrific for moving around in 3D worlds (or for anything else you'd like it to do). Like the four-way hat found on the mouse, all of the inputs on the Action pad can be configured to be either standard gamepad or joystick buttons, and/or keyboard keystrokes.

All in all, the GM2 stands tall as the best controller in its class. Most gamers will like the feel of the mouse, and will be familiar with the button layout of the Action Pad since it's very reminiscent of the keyboard layout most commonly used in first person shooters. Additionally, the ergonomically minded Action Pad is much more comfortable than a keyboard when used over prolonged periods of time.

Our only real gripe with this unit (and the only thing keeping the GM2 from getting an Editors' Choice award) is the mouse. Despite the fact that it's a USB device, its behavior is more along the lines of the less responsive PS/2 variety — as if it isn't truly being poled 120 times per second, as it should be. That said, its motion is acceptable, and if you aren't happy with it — or if you're simply in love with your existing mouse — you can move it aside and use the Action Pad with the mouse of your choice.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Great concept; Action Pad is fantastic; powerful programming options.

LOWS Mouse doesn't work as well as it should.

BOTTOM LINE While we strongly recommend the GM2 overall, keep in mind that you may want to keep your regular mouse handy in case you aren't happy with the GM2 configuration.

COMPANY
Saitek,
(310) 212-5412,
www.saitek.com

PRICE
$49.95 *(M.S.R.P.)*

OTHER OPTIONS

While there are other first-person controllers on the market, we're of the opinion that the best option for playing such games is still the mouse and keyboard. Looking to upgrade yours? Then head over to either Microsoft (*www.microsoft.com*) or Logitech (*www.logitech.com*) and check out the large assortment available.



PIII CPUs that look like Celerons? Say What?!

Many of the questions I received this month have dealt with AMD's Athlon. And while I've only answered one such question here in Q&A, I've written a huge feature on the subject at the beginning of this issue's Hard Stuff. So, if you are one of the people asking such questions, make certain you check it out!

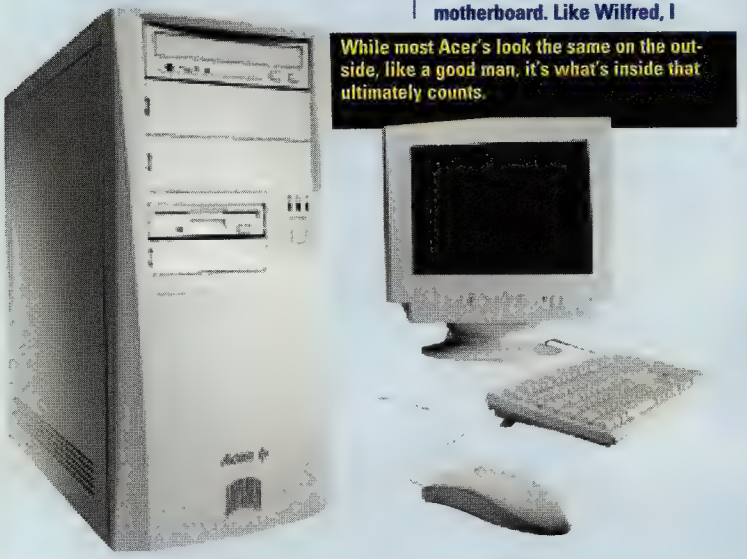
Q I'm having a problem with the system I recently built. When I'm in the middle of playing some of my games (e.g. *Baldur's Gate, Age of Empires,* and several others) the game will up and quit. There is no error message; I simply get dumped back to the desktop. I have an AMD Athlon 550MHz processor on a FIC SD-11 motherboard, 192MB RAM, a 3COM 56k modem, a Creative Labs Sound Blaster PCI 128 sound card, and a 3D Blaster Banshee video card, all running under Windows 98. Do you have any idea what the problem could be?

— RYAN LIVINGSTONE, VIA THE INTERNET

A Unfortunately, Ryan, the Banshee isn't one of the chips on AMD's "approved" list, so that could be the root of your problems right there. You can check out the extensive compatibility list at *www1.amd.com/athlon/config/*. As for other possibilities, is the RAM you're using on AMD's approved list? If not, this could be contributing to your woes, too. Since you're currently using at least two of your three DIMM slots, try experimenting with only leaving one stick of memory in your system while you play. Does this solve your problem? If not, keep trying the same thing with each of your DIMMs since it's possible that only one of them is the culprit. Also, stay on top of those BIOS updates.

Q After reading the Tech Q&A section in the April 2000 issue, I wanted to comment on Wilfred Burbanks' letter about his Acer. I also have an Acer Aspire — though mine is two years old and was weak to start with. It came with a K6 233MHz CPU, 32MB RAM, and a 2MB ATI video card integrated into the motherboard. Like Wilfred, I wanted to upgrade my video card, and in my case, I decided on a Voodoo3 2000 PCI card. I find it interesting that Acer told you that 3dfx cards wouldn't work in its systems, yet mine works without a hitch. Funny thing is, I've never been able to get a TNT to work in it at all. Is it just me, or does it seem like Acer tech support doesn't know what it's talking about?

— JOHN BENNIE, VIA THE INTERNET



While most Acer's look the same on the outside, like a good man, it's what's inside that ultimately counts.

A No, I don't think that it's that they don't know what they're talking about — I think it's just that they were probably referring to newer Acers. You have to keep in mind that although your computer and Wilfred's computer both have an Aspire logo on the case, what's inside your PCs are very different.

Q I've been told that disabling my Level 2 cache can increase my gaming performance. Is this true? I followed the tweak section of your Hardware Bible to a "T" but don't recall this being mentioned. My system is a PII 350MHz w/512k cache, 128MB RAM, and I just swapped my 8MB ATI card and my 8MB Diamond Voodoo2 for a 32MB ATI Rage Fury. Will any of this improve my multiplayer performance over the 'net, or is hooking up via cable or DSL the only thing that will save my ass from getting fragged to bits?

— NAME WITHHELD, VIA THE INTERNET

A Not exactly. If you're overclocking a chip like the Celeron with its on-chip Level 2 cache, then disabling the cache can sometimes make a stubborn CPU more willing to function at overclocked speeds. On a regular CPU, however, disabling Level 2 cache is unnecessary and not recommended. Will disabling your cache help your Internet gaming experience? Absolutely not.

Q I recently received a Dell Dimension L550r as a gift, and I have a few problems with it. For starters, there's no AGP slot on the motherboard! Because of this (and the fact that I don't have any upgrade bays in my case) I would like to build a custom system using all the parts I can from this the existing computer: i.e. PIII 550MHz processor, 10GB UDMA HD, 128MB of PC-100 RAM, 40x CD-ROM, and the 17" monitor.

I was planning to buy a Sound Blaster Live! X-Gamer audio card and the Annihilator Pro AGP card to round the new system out. I also planned to buy the Asus P3C-2000 motherboard (1 4X pro AGP slot, 5 PCI slots, 1 ISA slot, 4 DIMM sockets, Intel 820 chipset, built-in ultra DMA/66 IDE, ATX form factor), as well as a new ATX case with a 300W power supply. But when I opened my new Dell case I didn't find a standard PIII processor in it (Slot 1 style); instead the CPU looks like it is sitting in a Socket 370 just as a Celeron would. I tested my system with WinTune to assure that I actually had a PIII chip, and it recognized it as a PIII 550MHz processor just as it does when the computer first loads up. I don't think this processor is going to work in my desired board. Do they make PIIIs for Socket 370 boards,

NEED HELP?

If you have a hardware question or comment, or a personal problem, write to:

Greg Vederman,
Hard Stuff, PC Gamer,
150 North Hill Drive,
Brisbane, CA 94005

or E-mail:
gvederman@pcgamer.com



Looking very much like a Celeron, the FC-PGA is a true Intel Pentium III.

or do I have some weird Dell crossbreed? If I am stuck with a half-breed, and I am stuck using this motherboard, what PCI video cards should I consider getting to improve upon the existing built-in Intel chip I already have on the mobo?

— RICHARD VILLARREAL, VIA THE INTERNET

A Your CPU is a true PIII, and it is of the FC-PGA variety. All you'll need to get it to run in your new motherboard is to get the Slotket II from a company called Iwill (*www.iwillusa.com*). It should only run about 30 bucks, and should allow you to go forward with your rebuilding plans.

Q **Let me start by saying that I am new to PCs, so excuse me if anything I say doesn't end up making a lot of sense. Having recently grown tired of my PlayStation, I figured it was time to give the PC a try. To this end, I bought a Compaq 5700t with a PIII 500MHz CPU, a Voodoo3, and an ESS sound card. I then purchased a copy of *Tomb Raider IV* and started playing away. Everything worked fine for a few minutes, and then suddenly, and without warning, I found myself back at my desktop. Eidos' support tells me to update my video and sound card drivers, but it seems this Voodoo3 1000 I have isn't mentioned anywhere on 3dfx's website, and ESS doesn't mention my sound card on its site, either. Can you help me find the drivers for both? I desperately need to play some good games, but these darn computers are a lot tougher to get running than a simple PlayStation.**

— NAME WITHHELD, VIA THE INTERNET

A You said a mouthful there, brother; PCs are a *huge* pain in the ass relative to game consoles. Still, until someone comes up with a mouse and keyboard that I can use while sitting on a couch, I'm sticking with my PC! As for driver updates for your video card and sound card, if such things existed, they'd be on Compaq's support website, but I checked for you, and unfortunately, there don't seem to be new drivers for either your sound card or your video card right now. In an effort to help, though, I looked around on Eidos' website and found some issues that *Tomb Raider IV* has with Voodoo3s. Check that info at *www.eidosinteractive.com/techsupp/index.html*. Also, download the latest patch for the game if you don't have it yet. Oh, and in case anyone is scratching their head in wonder, the Voodoo3 1000 is a special Compaq only model, which is why there's no mention of it anywhere on the 3dfx website.

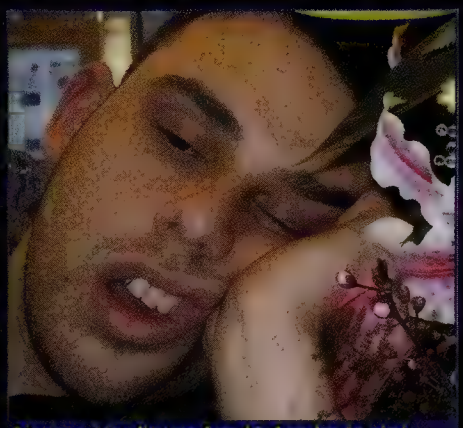
DEAR GREG

Q **Outrageousness, damnable and unbecoming. I refer, of course, to your Tech Q&A section. I like it! I nearly choked on my dinner of squid tentacles and pig intestines when I read your beautiful commentary last month. Droll and exquisite, I say. Perhaps you would do well to have your own column in the magazine since it is my firm belief that your writing surpasses even the skillz of "Creamy Smooth" Harms and Rob "what's-his-face" Smolka. Certainly, Whitta's literary prose is impressive, but his work is goat dung and pig snot compared to your ingenious praxis of the English language. Yes, I acknowledge the pure awesomeness that emanates from your deity being. You are wise, you are comical, and you are spiffier than Sean Connery as the original James Bond.**

Although your skill with multiplayer slaughter is not your most admirable trait, your (verbal/written) defiance of Whitta's ghastly, cruel, inhumane butchering certainly exceeds commendability. Your shiny gat strikes fear into Dan Morris — it's true; I can sense these things. Your tactful evasion technique in *StarCraft* must frustrate even the greatest of crafters. None outshine your mastership; down into the deepest pits of Dante's Inferno with all those who oppose you. Whitta shall burn; Dan shall grovel before you as manservant; Jeremy will become a Green party advocate, Billy will be deprived of his burger-thon; Rob will be forever stuck in his crouching position, unable to do naught but gnaw on the knees of his *Team Fortress* opponents; and Jay...well, I don't know much about Jay, so I guess he can live.

Rule the world, Vederman: if you build it, he will come. Although "it" is still undefined and "he" is yet to be determined, this proved to be a fine strategy for Ray Kinsella. Hail Vederman! Your hand brings chaos and destruction! Your gaze can melt even the heartiest of snowmen! And your booming voice to thrash congress! I salute you, Vederman, as a king amongst your peers, a shining pinnacle of literary genius, and the maneditor that rings such awesome splendor to the magazine we so lovingly call our own.

— IL CAMPIONE DI JOSTA, VIA THE INTERNET



After receiving flowers from his fans for the ninth time in a month, Greg ponders the meaning of it all.



Here we see technical editor Greg Vederman relaxing after a grueling five minutes of work on this month's Hard Stuff.

A Brother, you haven't read the magazine in about six months, have you? Billy's dead and buried out in a dumpster behind the building; Whitta, in a bizarre twist of fate, got deported to Cuba; and Jay, that rat-bastard of an art-boy — he's out in his car sniffing glue. Oh, and Jeremy wants to know what it means to be in the Green Party. As for the rest of your comments, all I can say is that I like you're style. You and me, we gotta party. Maybe not right now, because I'm sort of busy and stuff, and maybe not, like, tomorrow or next year because I'll be busy and stuff, but maybe after that. Oh, and where's your frickin' technical question? How can I be expected to answer personal issues *and* technical questions if you weirdos don't send me any technical questions? Sure, I like talking about puss boils and rotten girlfriends, but what's the point of it all if I can't tell you what video card to buy? It's all about telling you what video card to buy! That's all I'm saying. Word up. Peace out.

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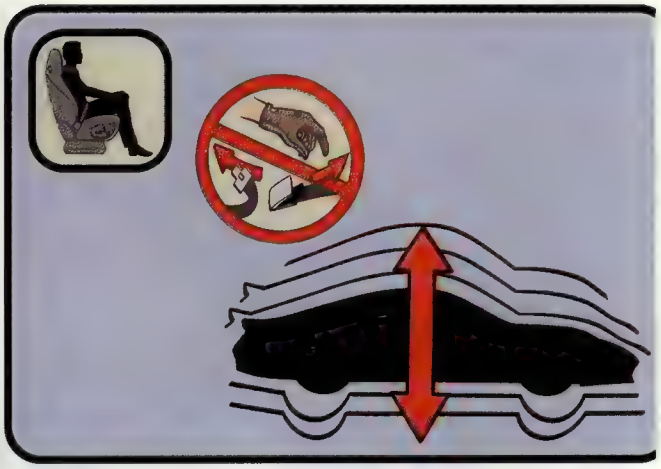
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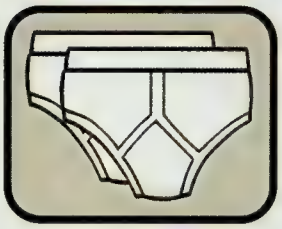
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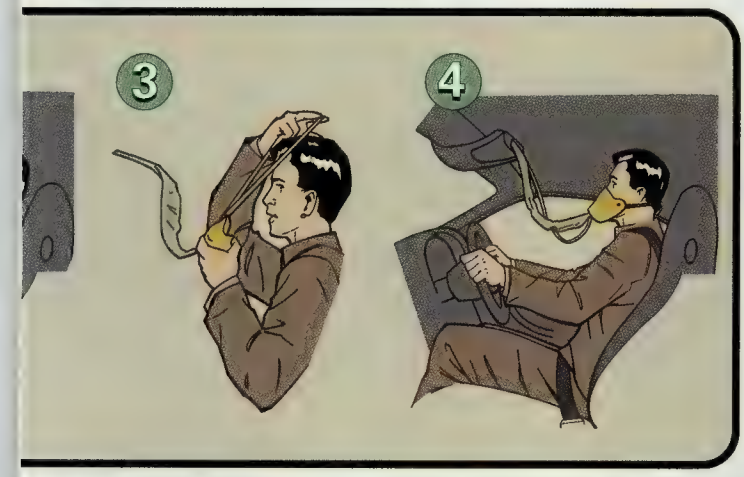
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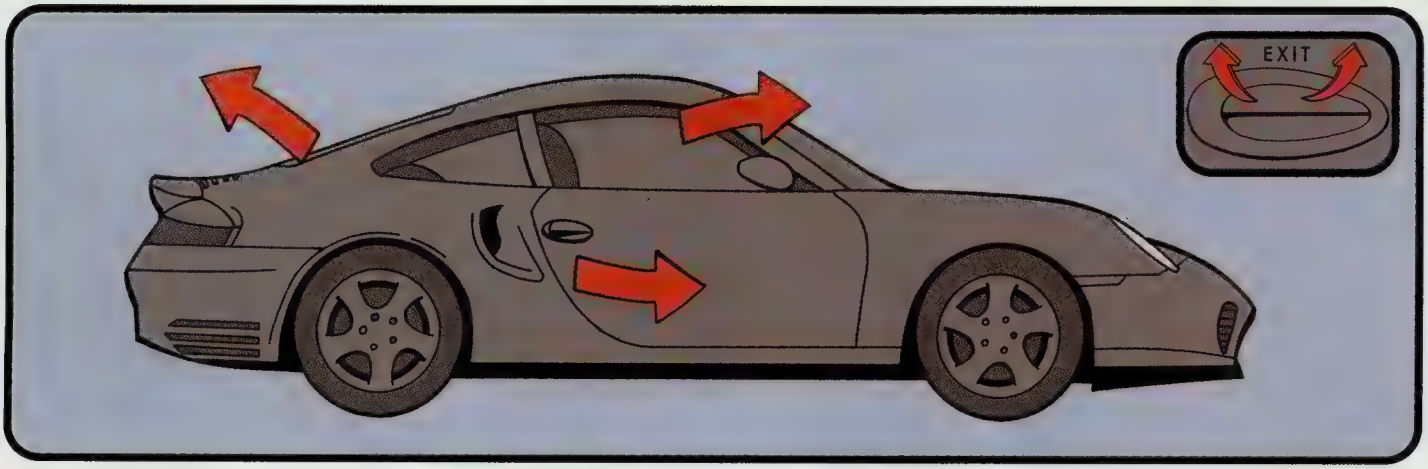












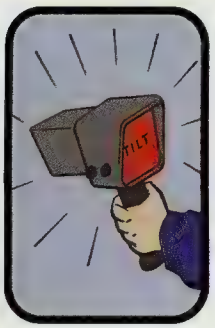




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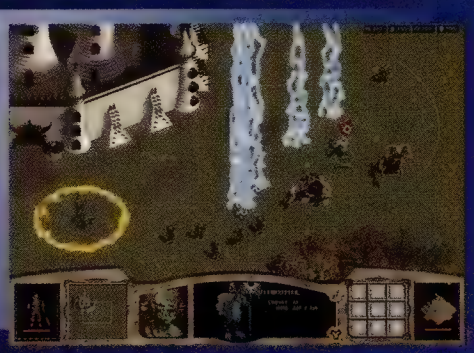
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T. LIAM MCDONALD



EXTENDED PLAY

ADD-ONS SCENARIO DISCS UPGRADES BUG PATCHES

SimStuff

Add-ins and utilities for *The Sims* are already flooding the web, and Maxis itself is leading the way. Need any more proof that this game has caught the popular imagination?

My sessions with *The Sims* always eventually devolve into torture. *(Actually, so do McDonald's relationships with real people. —Ed.)* I can't help it. It just amuses me to watch a Sim fall deeply in love and then witness his beloved hit on the neighbor repeatedly. The betrayed spouse can be driven so insane he eventually loses bladder control and merely stands in the middle of the room screaming, crying, and peeing on the floor. Is this a great game or what?

Luckily for my Sims, I'm not all about mental cruelty, and Maxis' attention to add-ins and utilities has guaranteed that there will be no shortage of *Sims* diversions anytime soon. Will Wright's game is incredibly modular, allowing for near-infinite expandability. Maxis wisely tapped this by nurturing a vibrant online community in anticipation of the game's release, and the company is now unveiling new add-ins and utilities every Thursday. Only a few weeks after the release, there were already dozens of official and user-created skins, furniture editors, and modification programs; with several hundred thousand copies of *The Sims* on hard drives worldwide, you can count on more.

The best starting point for all this free fun is the official site at *thesims.com*, but several excellent fan sites have also appeared. With registration at *thesims.com*, you get access to a download page full of goodies. New furniture is being added almost weekly, so your Sims can now own a cuckoo clock, several new types of wall lighting, and a slot machine. Of these, the slot machine is the standout, since you can have your Sims gamble in their own living rooms — an excellent way to supplement income. *(We at* PC Gamer *are in full support of all gambling-related additions to popular games. —Ed.)* Five new houses — three of them massive mansions with pools — are also available, as well as a new skin set that includes two kids, Sherlock Holmes, Xena, and Hercules. The Valentine's Day skins contest produced some terrific couples: Antony and Cleopatra, Romeo and Juliet, Robin Hood and Maid Marion. *(But nothing comes close to the Tony and Carmela Soprano skins. —Ed.)*



HomeCrafter makes importing pictures for use as flooring and wallpaper incredibly easy. You can import and preview at the same time in one simple program. I put in a picture of my son as a personal touch.

Three new programs allow a finer level of customization, with varying degrees of success. The most important one is SimShow, the custom skins editor. This program, along with a paint tool and a fine hand at image editing, are all you need to put yourself into the game. The simplest way to use SimShow is as a paper doll set to fine-tune the bodies and textures already in the game. If you also download the tutorial file, you'll get a pretty good idea of the process that goes into modifying clothing and facial textures. There are really only two files (one for the face and one for the clothing) that need to be edited. Figures can be viewed from any angle and at three sizes, then exported for use in the game.

FaceLift is a custom face-editing program that lets you create and export faces. The mechanics are a bit awkward, but they work adequately enough to do the job. The first layer of control is a set of six buttons that essentially auto-mutate a set of heads. A fine-control window is more effective for getting a specific look, since you can set specific features like nose, mouth, and chin size. Unfortunately, there are still glitches in the most recent version, which supposedly



Facelift is the custom face-editor for *The Sims*, but it's still a bit rough. In theory, you can modify and export faces. In practice, it can be tricky.

www.DailyRadar.com

fixed Voodoo conflicts. I had trouble using the 3D view to look at my head from different angles, and was crushed to discover that my nifty new heads could not be exported due to a bug. Let's hope these problems are fixed by the time you read this.

Fortunately, HomeCrafter works much better. This is a pretty simple utility that allows you to import JPEGs and Bitmaps as flooring or wall covering. A sample house is provided to test textures out in an actual environment. To adjust the sound of footsteps on a floor texture, individual tiles can be assigned three levels of sound: hard, soft, or medium. Floor and wall textures are proliferating faster than any other add-in for *The Sims*, partly because they are so easy to create and export.

Maxis has also splintered two micro-programs from *The Sims* and put them up as free downloads. Mini Aquarium is, well, a miniature version of the game's fish tank that sits on the desktop. You can click buttons to clean, feed, or watch the fish, and a little happiness bar goes up and down to reflect how you're doing. Similarly, Cry Baby carves out the baby-raising element and makes it a desktop app, so you can play, feed, or sing to the li'l one. This is basically just PC Tamagochi.



Cry Baby is one of the microgames from *The Sims*, available for use a desktop time-waster.

A couple of good third-party items are also in the works. Blueprint (*www.simheaven.com/blueprint*) is a comprehensive 3D editor that enables you to create actual game objects (furniture, decorations, and so on). This is a wire-frame utility similar to 3D Max, enabling you to draw and paint objects. When Blueprint is finished (it's in beta right now), you'll be able to export these objects for use in the game, at least in theory. Object creation is one of the more challenging customization elements in *The Sims*, so this one may take a bit of work to get right. Gameblazer (*www.gameblazer com*) has created Swap-and-Play, which stores different neighborhoods in a holding area and swaps them out, so you can have more than one game running at a time. The free version has a two-game limit. To store more neighborhoods, you need to buy a Gameblazer "key," which costs $20 for two years of use.

> Luckily for my Sims, I'm not all about mental cruelty.

Some of the fan sites also bear mention. Mall of the Sims (*www.mallofthesims.com*) is the most inventive, designed like a shopping mall directory. Various departments are devoted to fashion (skins), furnishings, electronics, and so on, with the shelves still filling up. The Mall also includes the editing info for the "Holy Simoleons" money cheat, which is too elaborate a process to explain here. A real-life fashion designer is currently creating clothing for Sims (*www.aggressive.to/fashions/*), and a wealth of floor and wall textures can be found at The Sims Resource (*sims.xtremesimz.com*). Plenty of useful sites branch off from there, making this the Planet-Quake of *The Sims*.

PCG

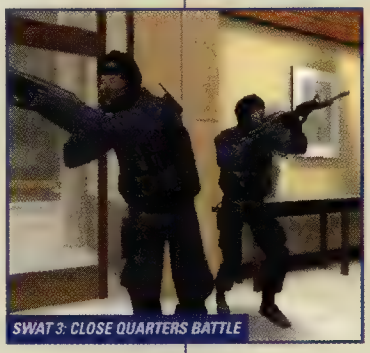


SimShow is the ultimate paper doll utility for *The Sims*, allowing more flexibility to mix and match heads and torsos. It also makes texture importing possible.

BUG PATCHES

***Half-Life* v1.0.1.6:** Includes two new maps from the geniuses at Valve, titled Badlands and Crossover. Badlands is primarily an outdoors map with an emphasis on vertical positions, tailored for sharpshooters. Crossover is a mix of exposed outdoor areas and tight indoor spaces that provides a venue for varied and fast-paced CTF games. The patch also fixes a number of server-side issues, including a Linux "message of the day" fix. *(hl-10051016.exe)*

***Darkstone* v1.0.5b:** This patch will allow you to play new quests created and generated by the new quest editor. Adds a new mode, "Legend," wherein the monsters are much more difficult and regenerate life points. Monsters can no longer cast the reflection spell under the influence of forgetfulness. Character experience can now go up to 120. *(DsPatchUs1_5.zip)*



SWAT 3: CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE

***Grand Theft Auto 2* v1.03:** According to the cats at Take 2, this patch will "get the game running smoother and cleaner than ever before. Fully optimized and raring to go." That description sheds about as much light as my glow-in-the-dark wristwatch, but I'm sure it's all good stuff. *(GTA2v103wPatch.exe)*

***Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine* v1.2:** Installing this update will solve problems regarding RETURN TO PERU and catching Volodnikov in NUB'S TOMB. Also, control configuration dialogue box function properly, levels open properly and display the correct field of view, and several important action and display anomalies have been resolved in eight levels. *(Indiana-J3DUpdate1.2.exe)*

***Soldier of Fortune* Demo Patch:** Yes, this is for the demo. It features loads of fixes, including a DM "run speed" bar in the menu, LAN Only option in multiplayer config, "no rocket launcher" dm flag in menus, improved spectator chase cam, and new sniper rifle behavior. *(sofdemo57patch.exe)*

SWAT 3: Close Quarters Battle v1.2: This update includes a HTML-based FAQ, new AI behaviors, and fine-tuned gameplay adjustments. *(SWAT312Up.EXE)*

Total Annihilation: Kingdoms v3.0: With this patch, *Kingdoms* should now run at least two times faster in all instances. This means faster user interface, faster game loading, and faster gameplay. *Kingdoms* can now automatically adjust the level of shadow detail and animation updating to maintain a responsive frame rate, and the RAM footprint has been reduced by 24MB. Also, two additional maps have been added to the game. *(TAK30BBupdate.exe)*

YOU'LL FIND ALL OF THESE PATCHES ON THE CD! PLUS, YOU'LL FIND OUR PATCHES ARCHIVE AT *WWW.DAILYRADAR.COM*. ALWAYS CHECK THE INCLUDED README FILES FOR A COMPLETE LISTING OF FIXES AND ENHANCEMENTS.

ROB SMOLKA



THE POINT AFTER

BASEBALL · BASKETBALL · FOOTBALL · HOCKEY · GOLF · SOCCER · ETC.

Single-Player by a Landslide

Normally, I take great pride in my individuality. I couldn't care less if the whole world loves a game, a movie, or whatever...I would rather experience things for myself and then form my own opinion. On many occasions the entire staff will be bashing or praising something, only to hear me chime in with my opposing thoughts. I don't do it to be difficult — really, I don't *(Not so sure about that, myself — Ed.)* — but I refuse to be swayed or stifled just because the majority has a different view on something.

This staunch sense of self can sometimes cause problems, though, especially since I am speaking to more than 350,000 potential readers of this column (okay, I know that not everyone that buys this magazine bothers to read my column, but I like to think they do...it helps me sleep better at night). For this reason, I posed a question to you back in the March issue, asking if I was out of touch. The reason for my self-doubt: I find multiplayer sports gaming to be a tedious and time-wasting process, and prefer the single-player aspects much more. I wasn't really sure what kinds of responses I'd get, but I must admit that I was shocked by the almost unanimous support for my way of thinking — the ratio was literally 25-1!

This should serve as a major wake-up call to sports game developers that think they can get away with shoddy artificial intelligence or a minimal feature set just because they're supplying Internet play options. Yes, it's great to have the ability to go online to play, but as you can clearly see from the following reader responses, single-player gaming remains the preferred method for most of us. Here are a few samples:

Smoke receives an overwhelming show of support regarding the virtues of single-player sports gaming. Hey sports game developers — get a load of this!

I want you to know that you are not the only one feeling that way about games. Single-player is something to be treasured.

— Dan B.

Please don't stop rallying behind the cause of single-player sports gaming!

— Jeremy Ellis

It's worrisome how the companies are so eager to treat single-player modes as an afterthought. Thanks for eloquently speaking up for the rest of us!

— Scott Osborne

I realize that creating the AI for some of these games can be both time- and resource-consuming, but I think that there are many gamers who simply do not like to play online games. If I want to socialize I can turn off the computer and talk to my wife or a friend.

— James Fruehling-Watson

A large portion of the "Leave Me Alone" column dealt with the fauna passing as humans that inhabit the Internet. It seems I'm not alone in my disdain for them:

Very seldom do I find someone who plays simply for the thrill of competition, rather than overcoming a complex because his mother still dresses him.

— Richard Davison

Very seldom do I find someone who plays simply for the thrill of competition, rather than overcoming a complex because his mother still dresses him.

— Richard Davison

You left one category of multiplayer gamer out of your article. The worst type is the cheater.

— Ron

I think that the Internet will corrupt games and the single-player mode.

— Mark

The lack of basic courtesy and etiquette in our society has manifested itself into online gaming. Many times I've played people who didn't know how to win or lose gracefully. This type of behavior is, of course, not just limited to sports games — it crosses every genre. Because of this, my first criteria before purchasing *any* game is a *PC Gamer* review extolling the solid *single-player* aspect of the game.

— Stephen A. Telford

I am mostly into strategy games, but I can tell you from experience that this multiplayer problem affects all gaming genres. While multiplayer is here to stay, I hope we never see the day that the gaming industry fails to take into consideration the wants and needs of us players who still place our emphasis on the single-player modes of our favorite games.

— Tom Whidby

I played *NHL 2000* online and was treated to a total slaughtering by some smart-ass punk who had somehow tweaked his players to move twice as fast as mine.

— Hugh Jhardon

If I want contact with other human beings, I'll pry off the boards that are nailed across my door and speak to somebody I know. Then, when they tell me I'm lame, at least they know me well enough to really know why.

— Joe Freund

To be fair, I wanted to present the opposing side of this argument. That's not been possible given the dearth of support. In a perfect world, I would have an intelligent online human opponent available at my beck and call, twenty-four hours a day, ready to give me a challenging game. I think we can safely say that the chances of achieving the perfect AI are a lot better than this scenario ever coming to pass (unless any of you care to volunteer for the job...and I don't anticipate getting any takers).

PCG



Until the day comes when someone volunteers to be Smoke's 24-hour, on-call online opponent, he (and the majority of his readers) will stick to the single-player game for pure gaming goodness.

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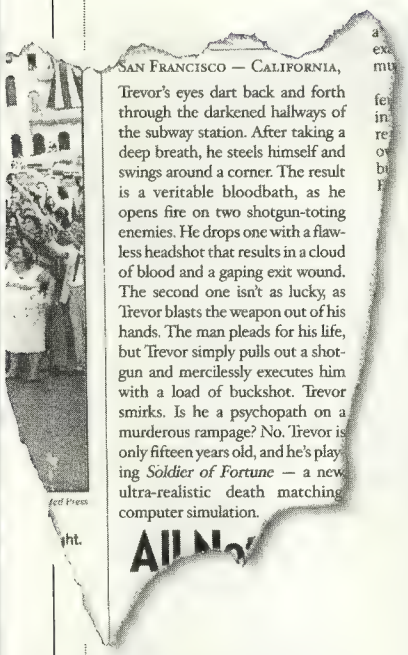
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COLIN WILLIAMSON

The Non-Violence Issue



San Francisco — California,

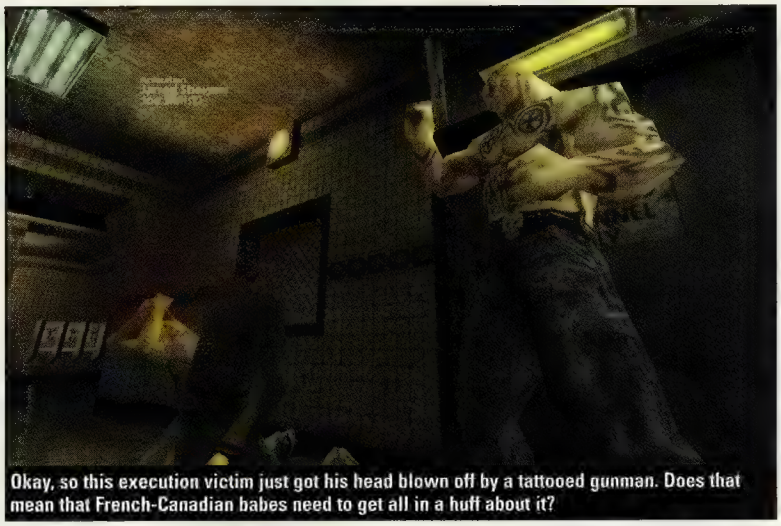
Trevor's eyes dart back and forth through the darkened hallways of the subway station. After taking a deep breath, he steels himself and swings around a corner. The result is a veritable bloodbath, as he opens fire on two shotgun-toting enemies. He drops one with a flawless headshot that results in a cloud of blood and a gaping exit wound. The second one isn't as lucky, as Trevor blasts the weapon out of his hands. The man pleads for his life, but Trevor simply pulls out a shotgun and mercilessly executes him with a load of buckshot. Trevor smirks. Is he a psychopath on a murderous rampage? No. Trevor is only fifteen years old, and he's playing *Soldier of Fortune* — a new ultra-realistic death matching computer simulation.

Once the media gets ahold of *Soldier of Fortune*, gamers may never be able to find a date again. And for Colin, who rarely gets dates, this is a very bad thing indeed.

Arrgh. Don't you just despise that type of paranoia-inspiring, mass media "reporting?" Though I'm responsible for writing the preceding paragraph, it goes without saying that just about every mainstream paper and magazine in the USA will be printing something similar upon *Soldier of Fortune*'s release. After all, computer games are responsible for the downfall of American society and the collapse of the family unit — don't you read the newspapers?

I figured all this game-violence hoohah would blow over quite naturally, and certainly never affect my personal life. But the foul head of anti-gaming hysteria found me with a vengeance recently when a very promising date turned horribly sour thanks to the forces of media hype. I know *Soldier of Fortune* will only make the situation worse.

I had a date with an incredibly attractive French-Canadian woman last month, and the evening was *over* as soon as she found out about my job. "Computer games disgust me!" she blurted out, making a sudden shift from her previously cutie-pie demeanor. "Did you know that there's a game where you drive a car, and you must *hit* people? And you get more points if they are old people? That's *seeck!*"



Okay, so this execution victim just got his head blown off by a tattooed gunman. Does that mean that French-Canadian babes need to get all in a huff about it?

At this point, I realized my chances for a little je ne sais quoi were completely shot, because *some* chucklehead from the Associated Press (or maybe *Hot French-Canadian Women Monthly*) had written an "expose" on Interplay's *Carmageddon*. Whoever was responsible, he or she did a pretty good job of implanting the misguided notion in this woman's brain that computer games are a terrible disfiguring force on society.

> To the mass media, a game featuring fighters who morphed into dragons and devoured their opponents was infinitely more realistic than a blood-soaked Hollywood movie.

I remember the absurd media furor surrounding the *Mortal Kombat* games. This was also denigrated as "ultra-realistic violence." To the mass media, a game featuring fighters who morphed into dragons and devoured their opponents was infinitely more realistic than a blood-soaked Hollywood movie.

If you want to get technical, *MK* was *not* the first game to feature "realistic blood and gore" — that award goes to *Fist of the North Star*. This game was based on a Japanese anime film that consisted of two hours of boring dialogue interspersed by the protagonist punching people and making their heads explode. The game sped up the pacing of the film by simply replacing the dialogue with *more* exploding heads. It kicked ass.

Yes indeedy, the media fallout surrounding *Soldier of Fortune* is gonna be nasty — after all, if people get their panties in a twist over something as ridiculously over-the-top as *Mortal Kombat* or *Quake III*, how in the hell are they going to react to a game that simulates getting shot in the face with a Colt .45? In previous 3D shooters, waxing a guy usually resulted in him exploding into a shower of indistinct giblets. In *Soldier of Fortune*, shooting someone typically results in him clutching his wound, bleeding like a stuck pig, and screaming at the top of his lungs. While I still don't think the violence can be described as *real*, it's definitely a step beyond what we've seen in the past — and it should be interesting to see if the rest of the industry follows suit.

As for my opinion, I kinda like *Soldier of Fortune* — the AI's behavior and the ability to pinpoint specific body locations make for some *very* interesting gameplay. It's no *Half-Life*, but the game's gimmick works. And this is coming from a guy who despises real-life guns, has never gotten into a fistfight (despite Dan Morris' constant pleading for a submission fighting match), and really knows how to have fun on a date with a cute French-Canadian woman.

Lousy newspapers...hang tough, my friends. After *SoF* hits the streets, we may never date again. And for people like me, who so rarely get out on dates, this is truly bad news. Boy, do I hate the media.

PCG

MICHAEL WOLF



LithTech RPGs?

When two major RPG developers start using a first-person action engine for their RPGs, Der Wolf starts asking them some profound questions.

Monolith Productions, the development house that has brought us such games as *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* and *Blood*, has been marketing their LithTech engine to developers for some time. Now that the acclaimed engine has reached version 2.0, two major RPG developers, Black Isle Studios and New World Computing, have licensed LithTech to create honest-to-goodness roleplaying games and not more first-person shooters.

Using a first-person shooter engine for a roleplaying game isn't such a new concept — after all, *Anachronox* from ION Storm uses the *Quake II* engine, and *System Shock 2* used the same engine as *Thief: The Dark Project*. However, neither Black Isle Studios nor New World Computing are companies you'd think of when it comes to licensing engines for their games. Curious, I tracked down some of the RPG geniuses behind the decisions to find out what spawned this interest in LithTech.

In a word, it's flexibility.

According to Peter Ryu, a producer at New World Computing, "The LithTech engine lets you do almost any type of game," he says. New World Computing currently has several different games in the works — right now *Might and Magic VIII: Day of the Destroyer* is at the top of the list, but it will use a modified version of the game engine introduced in *Might and Magic VI*, albeit with some tweaks (like mouse-look). The LithTech engine, however, will be used for *Might and Magic IX*.

The designers still aren't sure exactly how the game will use the engine. Ryu says, "We might do [a] first-person and overhead [view], both in the same game. We wanted all that freedom, and LithTech let us do that." Also, New World is working on a game set in the Might and Magic universe, but is something different from the hardcore roleplaying games and turn-based strategy games (represented by the Heroes of Might and Magic series). This new game, *Might and Magic Legends*, will be more of an action-oriented first-person game using the strong online capabilities of the LithTech engine as well as its powerful 3D geometry support.

While details are sketchy on both of New World's LithTech titles, Ryu confirmed that *Legends* would contain multiplayer options for as many as 16 people (a number that could change by the time the game is finished). However, it will also contain a single-player mode and will let players fight through the *Might and Magic* universe (which will be different from Enroth or Erathia, the two worlds of *Heroes of Might and Magic* and *Might and Magic VI* and *VII*).

> Monolith has recently announced a full-featured extension of the LithTech engine for massively multiplayer online games.

The other major RPG developer working with the LithTech engine, Interplay's hot in-house team Black Isle Studios, opted to use the engine so they could focus on content. Feargus Urquhart, Black Isle's Division Director, says, "The engine will allow Black Isle to focus on making the RPG content we are known for without having to worry about the technology of the engine."

Black Isle has created some of the industry's best RPGs, including *Baldur's Gate* and *Planescape: Torment*. With their emphasis on in-depth content, we can look forward to some incredible games.

However, Black Isle isn't revealing the games to benefit from the engine. Urquhart says, "Well, I can say that the team that just finished up *Torment* is going to be using the engine and there are already around ten of them working toward putting a prototype together. Just to hint at something, we are putting together a project that a lot of people have been asking us to do." Sounds good to me.

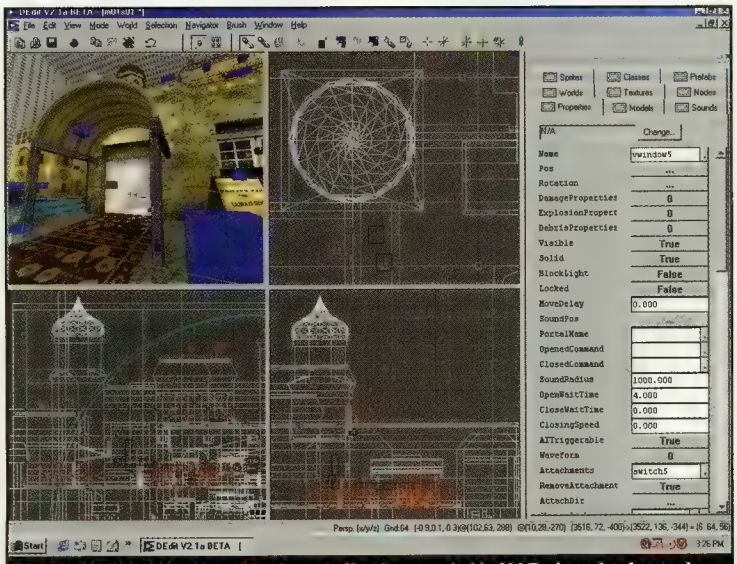
Monolith has also recently announced a full-featured extension of the LithTech engine that will let developers quickly and easily create massively multiplayer online games. The first game using LithTech Online will be a Fox license, although at this time no one is saying which property is in the spotlight.

Monolith seems to be doing the right things with the LithTech engine. While direct comparisons to other game engines like the *Unreal* or *Quake III* engine are spurious at best, it seems that Monolith's dedication to flexibility, support, and a lower cost has made LithTech the engine of choice for many developers. At the same time, roleplaying gamers can only benefit from the extra attention designers put into the content of an RPG, with the demands of the game engine accounted for by LithTech.

"Since we can spend the time on gameplay and design, we should be able to push the CRPG genre even farther in our upcoming games," Urquhart says. And there isn't anything wrong with that.

For additional information on the companies that have licensed the engine and other projects in the works, check *www.lith.com*.

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Here's an inside look at how developers tailor the remarkable LithTech engine for use in the creation of roleplaying games. Time to get to work on those castles and dungeons!

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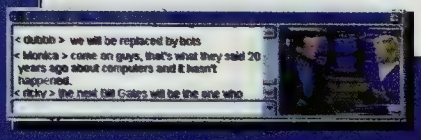
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Good Things in Small Packages

New games to the right of him, new games to the left, volleying and thundering! The Colonel runs gleefully through the field of independent wargame developers.

That ponderous groaning sound you hear is a massive paradigm shifting. As almost all the traditional Big Companies are turning their backs on wargames, the breach is being sealed by a veritable host of small-company products. It's the sort of paradox that warms a grognard's heart like Royal Navy rum. For the first time in recent memory, I am inundated by more new and interesting titles than I have time to play...and almost all of them are coming from scrappy indie developers.

> Smaller development studios can lavish proper attention to the niche wargames that the big boys have all but written off.

Despite some rough edges and amateurish blunders, not one of the four titles here is a total dog's breakfast; each manifests energy, creativity, determination, and ambitious production values.

Emblematic of the lot, I think, is *Brigade Combat Team* (developed by ProSim), distributed by Shrapnel Games. *BCT* is the brainchild of Captain Patrick Proctor (U.S. Army Field Artillery), and it's very much a one-man project. Proctor has taken the core logic of the Pentagon's venerable mainframe JANUS engine and adapted it for the PC with admirable fidelity. It's a simulation of modern combined-arms combat, somewhat along the lines of *TacOps*.

Movement is dictated by real-world contour lines, not hexes, and I really liked the spartan, no-nonsense graphics (although I do hope future revisions allow us to choose NATO unit symbols over the vehicle icons presently displayed). The overall look and feel conveys a fine sense of authenticity. The AI is strong. Both the manual and the tutorials are first rate, and the price ($22.95) is definitely attractive.

Be warned, though, that *BCT* is one helluva tough game to master. The interface staggers under the weight of encrusted, esoteric acronyms, and if you don't know your MRRs from your SOKOLs, the learning curve is formidable. Other problems: massive redrawing slow-downs and *grand mal*-inducing flicker, apparently caused by a lack of buffering. Worse yet is an appallingly sludgy response to mouse input. Simply put, selecting a single unit is a hunt-the-pixel pain in the ass.

Still, this is Proctor's first effort and he is methodically working to improve the game. In its current state, it merits only a guarded recommendation, but I suspect it's a diamond in the rough that just needs a bit more polishing.

A bit more problematic is *Red Thunder* (Edensoft), an ambitious simulation of the apocalyptic Russian summer offensive of 1944, a.k.a. "The Destruction of Army Group Center." At the moment, only one big operational scenario (35 turns) is available, but several new ones are in development and anyone who buys the initial version can add them on at no additional cost. *Red Thunder* looks and plays like a classic boardgame. It has a sound "blitzkrieg" fluidity, a vast playing area, and some welcome creative touches (partisan operations, river-crossing units, rear-echelon security troops, etc.).

What it does *not* have and desperately needs is a decent manual. The online documentation is infuriatingly sparse, uninformative, and amateurishly redundant.

The Russian Front gets a much more professional treatment in *Smolensk '41*, the first in a series of "Panzer Campaign" games from gutsy little HPS Simulations. The historical Smolensk campaign was notable because it marked the first time Stalin deployed T-34s in large numbers. There's a lot to like here, starting with value for the money: 19 scenarios and a titanic campaign of 170 turns, covering 76,000 hexes.

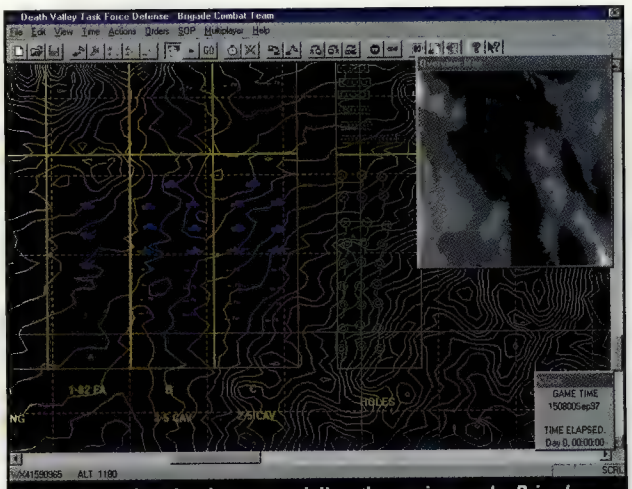
Smolensk '41 is a John Tiller game, and veteran gamers will quickly recognize the somewhat-modified engine from Talonsoft's late, lamented Battleground series. There's an epic sweep to the campaign, and the individual battles accurately reflect the power of artillery, the grinding attrition of overworked German units from incessant (if not always coordinated) Russian attacks, and the shock-value of the T-34s. *Smolensk '41* is great fun to play and belongs in the collection of every East Front aficionado.

Horse and Musket (also from Shrapnel) is in every respect a worthy sequel to the classic *Dragoon*. The feeling of solidity throughout is comforting. Everything works as it should and the graphics, while not flashy, are more than adequate. If you have even the slightest interest in 18th Century warfare, I recommend this title unreservedly. We are not exactly inundated with simulations of Poltava, Blenheim, or Malplaquet, after all, even though these engagements were pivotal events in European history.

So...four new wargames, all independently produced and published. The score so far: two "palpable hits," one near miss, and one title (*Brigade Combat Team)* that has not yet realized its potential, but will be a formidable contender when it does.

This New Wave of wargames is, as Bulwinkle used to say, "fraught with portent." All of these developers deserve encouragement and support, even the ones who didn't quite get it right this time. I salute them, and I look forward to more and better games down the road.

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Small independent developers can deliver the gaming goods. *Brigade Combat Team* has some rough edges, but is a great first effort from ProSim.

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Drunk drivers kill more people each year than all the world's wars put together. The chilling statistics on drunk-driving fatalities are made public all the time, and, depressingly, there is never any shortage of volunteers eager to get wasted and then get behind the wheel. Everyone thinks he is the exception, and seem endlessly confident that he can get home safely despite the fact that he's inebriated.

To prove a point, and indulge in some highly scientific experimentation, I decided to find out how I would fare while "driving under the influence". I chose to stage this exercise on one of the most realistic and challenging PC driving simulations on the market, *Grand Prix Legends* from Sierra. No one has ever produced a more intimidating driving sim, and this historically accurate 1967 Formula One simulator also delivers the added bonus of some of the most spectacular wipeout and crash effects ever incorporated into a PC racer. It was the perfect lab for my experiment.

My first job was to assemble an agreeable collection of spirits to help put me over the edge. No problem there. After raiding the liquor cabinet, I uncovered a mickey of Canadian Club, an unopened bottle of 12-year old single malt scotch, and a nearly full bottle of Sambucca (mmm...bucca). This stash, along with the dozen home-brewed dark ales I had in the fridge, would provide my experiment with appropriately high-octane fuel.

It was now time to power up the old Pentium and establish some baseline laps with *GPL* to determine exactly what sort of performance a clean and sober SimColumnist could manage. As fond as I am of this remarkable game, it had been a long time since I'd booted it up and, consequently, my personal best laptime at Monza was two ticks above the minute and a half mark. No matter. After about 20 minutes of practice, I was able to crack off a time of 1:30.11, which, although shy of my personal best, was still good enough to place my Lotus 49 sixth on the 20-car grid. Heading straight into a short 11-lap race, I managed to acquit myself quite well and worked my way up to fifth place after a long duel with John Surtees. The intensity of the battle and the enormous degree of concentration that was required left my hands sweaty.

After raiding the liquor cabinet, I uncovered a mickey of Canadian Club, an unopened bottle of 12-year old single malt scotch, and a nearly full bottle of Sambucca (mmm ...bucca).

I eschewed the traditional post-race champagne for two pints of dark ale and two fingers of Glenlivet single malt scotch. Once I began to feel the subtle effects of the alcohol taking hold, and that feeling of invincibility that accompanies it, I suited up for another go. Giving it everything I had in the qualifying session, I struggled valiantly to match my time from the previous event. Although the desire was there, the smoothness was not. I wound up qualifying eighth this time, with a 1:30.98. To my credit, I was able to move immediately into sixth place at the start of the race and then held that spot all the way up to lap seven — whereupon I misjudged my braking for the first Lesmo corner and spun my way back to ninth.

Bastard brakes! Oh well, you can't fly without fuel, so at the conclusion of the race I quenched my thirst with a couple more beers and a stiff CC & Seven on the rocks. I was ready for that little pantywaist Jimmy Clark now! Qualifying was more eventful this time, as I wrote off three cars en route to posting a disappointingly slow 1:31.92 lap (only good for twelfth on the grid). Come race time, I got caught daydreaming at the green flag and dropped to sixteenth after laying down a spectacular burnout patch for 20 yards. I managed to climb up a couple of positions over the next two laps by aggressively punting people out of my way, but I ultimately fell victim to my own belligerence on lap four and crashed spectacularly into the outside armco at the Curva Grande.

What had started as a clinically controlled sobriety test was now rapidly deteriorating into an alcohol-fueled grudge match, wherein your diligent SimColumnist was bent and determined to leap ahead of his digital adversaries by sheer force of will. The ensuing races weren't pretty. By the wee hours of the morning I had downed most of the beers, emptied about half a dozen shots of Sambucca (mmm...bucca) and put a very healthy dent in the whiskey. Not only could I no longer drive a complete lap without crashing, I found it difficult even to get out of the pits without causing a multi-car pile-up. My notes were all but illegible at this point, but I do remember concocting a plan at about 4 a.m. to boot up *Jane's USAF* so I could go and bomb the crap out of the Ferrari factory. (That dickweed Bandini had gotten in my way one too many times!)

As I finalize this column in the cold light of day — while nursing a monster hangover and struggling to figure out how to write an expense report for my editor to cover that bottle of Glenlivet *(Forget about it, Mahood. —Ed.)* — I sincerely hope that my little experiment has taught you all a valuable lesson. Save the bubbly for after the race and, if you must drink and drive, please *do* try this at home. You'll have no illusions.

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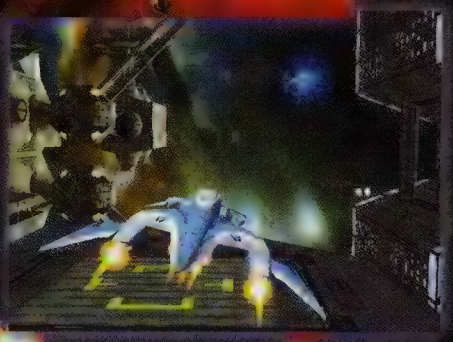
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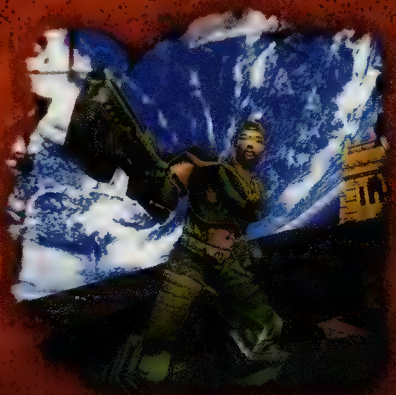
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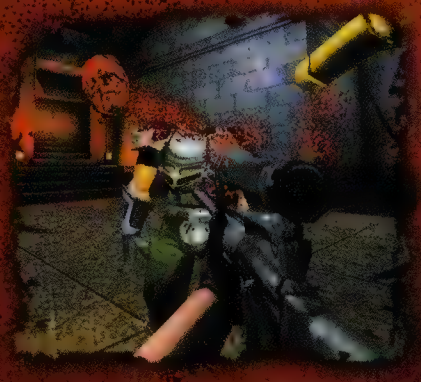
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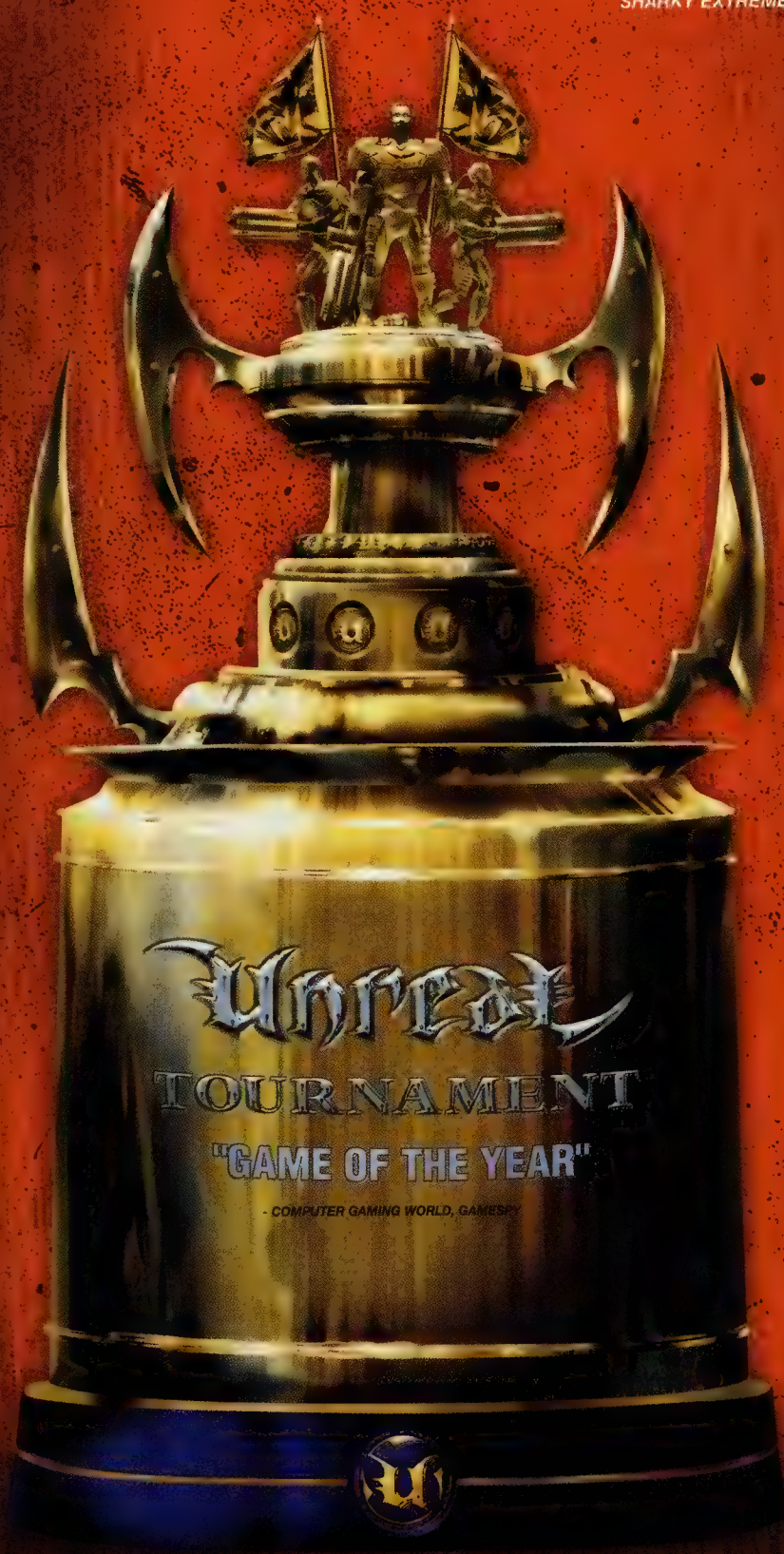
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SWAT 3

Dealing with tangos in Sierra's *SWAT 3* can be a thorny problem; these guys are smart, and they'll just as soon put a few bullets in you as listen to your demands for their surrender. To help you bring justice to the terrorist-filled streets of future LA, we put together this strategy guide, detailing numerous missions throughout the game.



BARRICADED SUSPECT: The attic is probably the worst possible place to encounter Brenner, but if you've done your job properly and cleared all the other rooms, at least you can be certain he's up here before you enter. You can bring your suspect in alive by using CS gas.

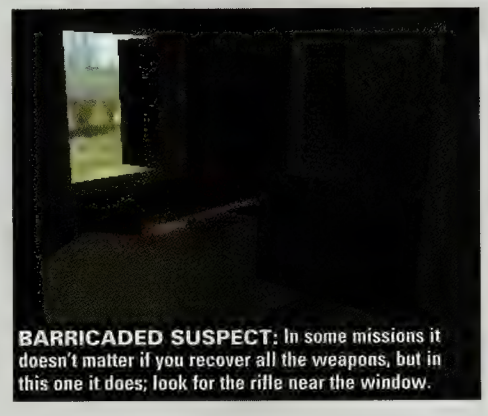
Barricaded Suspect — Freeway Sniper

WEAPONS: Hechler & Koch MP5 for entire element

DANGERS: This guy is literally a loose cannon — he's been popping off rounds at passersby on the freeway for the last three days. And while he might be suffering from manic depression, it doesn't seem to have affected his marksmanship. Still, there's a good chance you can bring this guy in unharmed as long as you keep your cool. If he isn't armed when you locate him, you can wrap this up in no time; if he is holding a weapon, things can get very hairy.

TACTICS: The fact that this is a three-story house is the main complication — the suspect could very well be at the top of the stairs holding a weapon as you enter. Therefore a good approach is to have one team take a right and move through the rooms heading for the kitchen as the second heads down the hall, leaving you to keep an eye on the staircase.

If the suspect is armed, your best bet for bringing him in alive is with CS gas. Find a spot out of his line of fire as you arm yourself with the CS grenade.



BARRICADED SUSPECT: In some missions it doesn't matter if you recover all the weapons, but in this one it does; look for the rifle near the window.

Use deadly force only as a last resort, and be aware that the suspect's girlfriend is also roaming about the place (clad only in a towel — *va-va-va-voom!*). Use the Evacuate command on the suspect and the civilian after they've been cuffed, then search the house for weapons; you'll find at least a rifle and possibly a pistol as well. You must recover these to end the mission.

Warrant Service — Hit and Run Suspect

GEAR: Hechler & Koch MP5SD for one member of each team and a Benelli M1 Super 90 for the other members of the teams; Element leader carries H&KMP5SD

DANGERS: You're dealing with militia types here, and it's likely they'd be proud to take down a cop who's "invaded" their home. Although the

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placement of suspects is randomly generated with each mission, pay extra attention to the garage area and the laundry room leading to it. And of course, take special care when opening any of the bedroom or bathroom doors.

TACTICS: Though you can only choose one entry point before the mission launch, you can use both entry points by having one team fall in and follow you to the other door. There's always a chance that Getts or his son will be standing armed and trigger-happy in the living room, so issue the BB&C (Breach, Bang, and Clear) order in quick succession to both teams. Send one team through the kitchen toward the garage while the other covers you as you explore the deadliest part of the house — the long hallway containing the bedrooms.

Notice that the first room on the right has been booby-trapped — open it and you'll take a lot of damage. Making sure that your cover team is a good distance from the hallway entrance, pop off a round to detonate the booby trap. The subsequent noise could send Getts or his son heading down the hallways, so be ready with a CS Grenade (a good trick is to toss it as hard as you can off a wall so it flies toward the end the hall). If you have time, turn on the lights whenever possible to increase your visibility. Remember — these guys will keep waving their guns around even as they choke on tear gas, so *be careful*!

Once the suspects are in custody, begin the rather time-consuming search of the house for weapons. Be sure to grab the pistol that Getts drops, check the basement for a couple of Uzis, and don't forget to look under the coffee table in the living room for yet another Uzi.

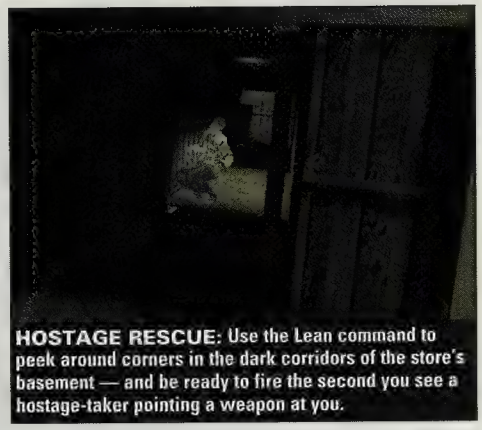


HOSTAGE RESCUE: Have the entire element enter the store at once to maximize cover and firepower, and expect to encounter at least one terrorist at the rear of the store almost the second you move in.

Hostage Rescue — Turkish Ambassador

GEAR: Hechler & Koch MP5SD for one member of each team and a Benelli M1 Super 90 for the other members of the teams; Element leader carries H&KMP5SD

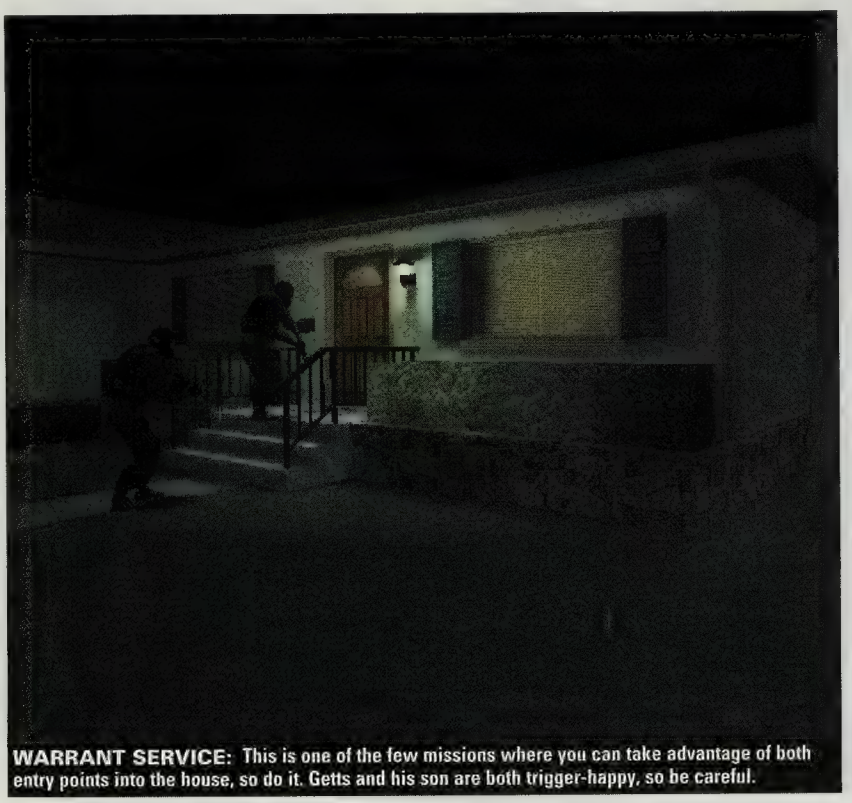
DANGERS: This is a whole other can of worms than your first two missions: not only has a hostage been taken, but there's also the possibility that the terrorists have a portable nuclear device. Your main enemies here, though, aren't the hostage-takers — they're the cramped environs of the store, the dimly lit basement, and the fact that your only point of entrance, the front door, couldn't be any more obvious or exposed to fire. Don't be surprised if you have to use lethal force early and often during this mission — in fact, you can pretty much count on it when playing on the highest difficulty setting.



HOSTAGE RESCUE: Use the Lean command to peek around corners in the dark corridors of the store's basement — and be ready to fire the second you see a hostage-taker pointing a weapon at you.

TACTICS: There's a good chance that either a terrorist or a collaborator will be in the storefront room, so use extreme caution when entering. Send in the entire element to maximize your fields of fire and provide cover for each other. It's possible to take the suspects in unharmed, but remember: if these guys point their weapon, they're likely to fire it the next second (and you don't lose any points for shooting at a suspect who has his weapon pointed at someone).

Head to the back of the store, tossing CS grenades into each successive storeroom and down the stairs leading to the basement where the hostage is held. Once in the basement, use the Lean command (or Opti-Wand) to peek around corners, and if you're unsure feel free to go ahead and use some more of that gas — you've got plenty of it!



WARRANT SERVICE: This is one of the few missions where you can take advantage of both entry points into the house, so do it. Getts and his son are both trigger-happy, so be careful.

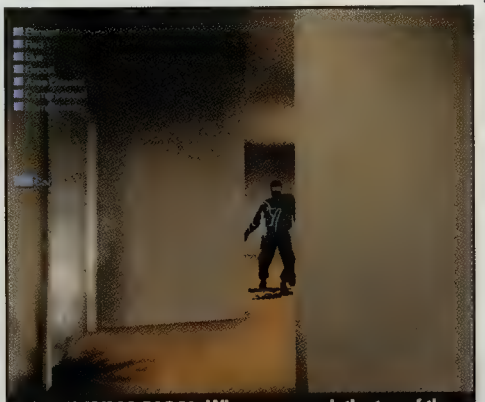
Home Invasion

GEAR: M4A1 for entire element

DANGERS: Your officers are more likely to survive the first few seconds of the mission by using the basement-level entrance. The heaviest concentration of bad guys will be in the kitchen, den, and living room areas, but don't be surprised if you find some hiding in bedrooms or even closets and bathrooms. These guys are stone-cold killers: not only will they open fire instantly, they'll also be cackling with glee as they do it.

TACTICS: Take control of the element immediately and have them fall in as *far* from the entrance as possible. Toss *several* CS grenades over the hedge. Use the Lean command or the Opti-Wand to ensure the yard is clear before advancing to the basement door, and expect to find at least one terrorist either on the stairs, at the door, or in the basement den.

After clearing the basement, go upstairs and bank CS grenades off the wall into the kitchen area. Use the double doors in the kitchen to enter the living room; if you move through the room that exits to the pool and try using the double doors *there* to enter the living room, you'll be dreadfully exposed to fire from terrorists shooting from outside through the windows. That's the single biggest threat in this mission, in fact; so keep an eye on all windows. Also watch out for the terrorists who may have moved into one of the rooms in the adjacent hallways.



HOME INVASION: When you reach the top of the stairs leading up from the basement, be sure to bang CS grenades off the wall into the kitchen.



ST. DIMITRI'S HOLY TRINITY CHURCH: When you reach the residential area, have one team cover the second floor while the other team clears the upper rooms.

St. Dimitri's Holy Trinity Church

GEAR: M4A1 for entire element

DANGERS: The large, open area on the lower level of the church gives the terrorists terrific fields of fire, as do the cramped stairwells and long hallways of the upper level. There are also a couple of closets where you might stumble across enemies.

TACTICS: It's possible to encounter tangos in the courtyard from the first moment the mission begins, so immediately have the entire element fall in with you away from possible threats. Use the Opti-Wand to check the courtyard as well as you can, then move to the hedge blocking your view of the doorway and toss a couple of CS grenades into the entrance. Getting past the first closed door is a real bear; your best bet is to open the door yourself (in a crouched position) with the entire element providing cover.

Take the element upstairs, being careful both as you ascend and as you reach the top where you might be exposed to gunfire from terrorists on the balcony. Head to the door at the other end of the balcony and have the element breach-bang-clear before entering the residential areas of the church.

Once inside, have one team stay in position while you take a team to clear out the third floor, and then use the entire element to clear the second floor. In the last room you'll find a secret entrance — use it to head downstairs, but don't be surprised if tangos have discovered this area. From here, just take it very easy and try to stay against walls to cut down on your exposure. The extra accuracy of the M4A1 will probably be your saving grace because of the long distances at which you'll be taking shots.



HOME INVASION: You can expect to meet the heaviest concentration of enemies near the front door of the house. Watch out for any gunmen who might have slipped outside and can shoot at you through the windows close to the bar area.

Ventura Hotel

GEAR: MP5SD for entire element armed with FMJ rounds

DANGERS: So long as you exercise some patience and caution — and use the following tactics — the only serious obstacles are the usual stuff like enemies at the bottom (or top) of stairwells, hiding in bathrooms, and so forth. There are many little rooms to investigate, but don't get in a hurry — there's no need to rush through this.

TACTICS: There's usually a gunman on the other side of the stairwell door as you start the mission — take him out, then leave one team to cover that area in case terrorists start roaming the second story. Take the second team downstairs and begin the process of clearing out the first floor. Move slowly, using the Opti-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 146



VENTURA HOTEL: Take the stairs down to clear out the ground level of the hotel — and be ready to encounter hostiles from the moment this mission starts.

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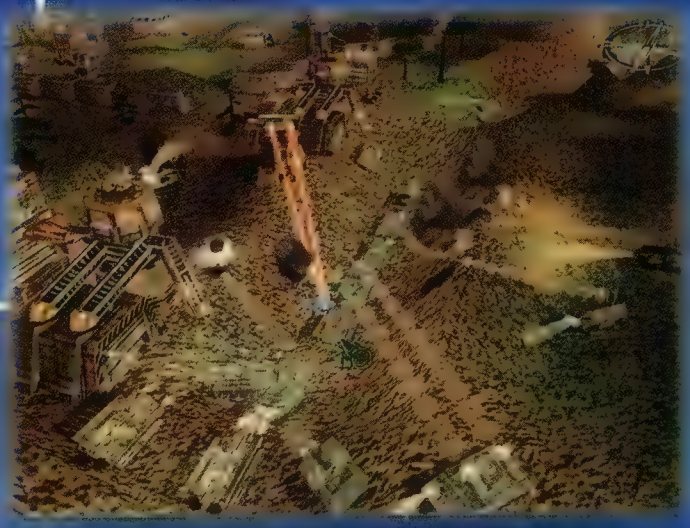
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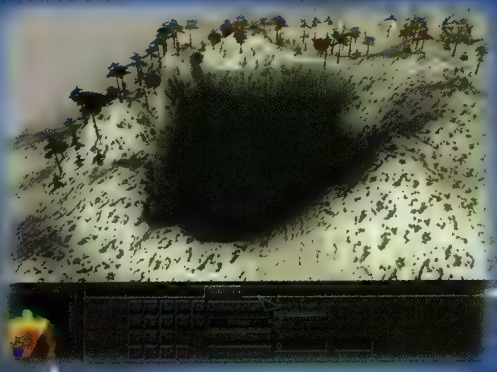
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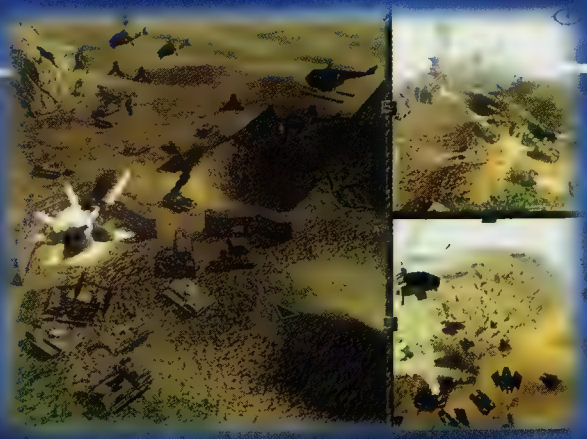




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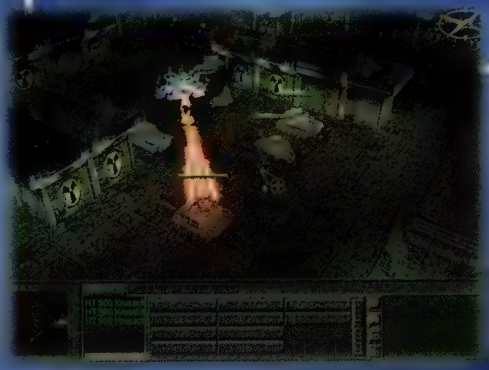
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VENTURA HOTEL: Quite often you'll find a terrorist hiding behind the bar in the lounge — but not always. Clear the entire lobby before ordering a team to breach-bang-clear the lounge.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 142

Wand, CS grenades, and bang-and-clear tactics before advancing into unknown territories. Clear the entire rear hallway (including bathrooms) before heading into the offices, to the front-desk area, and finally into the bar. Be extremely cautious here — the gunman is well protected by the bar itself.

The reason you worked the bottom area first is simple: there's a nice line of sight for a terrorist to take aim at you as you move between a couple of the conference rooms upstairs. By clearing all the threats downstairs first, you can now focus solely on the tangos on the upper level. Be liberal with your use of CS grenades before moving into hallways — never let teams advance into a hall without some type of cover. Bang and clear all rooms, and keep your eyes peeled for any bad guys who decide they want to leave a room full of hostages and explore the hotel. If a conference room has two entry points, take advantage of the fact and enter both simultaneously.



HOTEL CARLYLE: Hey, rookie, what are you thinking? You shouldn't stand in front of an open doorway when there's about a dozen crazed terrorists on the other side!

Hotel Carlyle

GEAR: MP5SD with maximum number of FMJ rounds for entire element

DANGERS: Not only is there a seemingly endless supply of terrorists to face, but you are constantly opening doors and entering inter-connected rooms — not good! Complicating things is the fact that there are terrorists roaming around the basement, and they must be eliminated before the mission is complete. Hostage identification can be problematic, too, because some hostage-takers are dressed in business suits or as regular hotel employees.

TACTICS: Your only logical choice is to start in the basement and work your way up; that way you won't have the guys down there sneaking up on you while you're in the middle of the real job — cleaning out the suite. It'll be tough, but it's doable (with repeated attempts!). Secure the elevator area on the penthouse level and toss CS grenades down the hallway, then have the teams bang and clear the first two doors as you move to clear the next one. A good tactic is to have them secure those rooms while you go straight down the hall and sneak in through the bedroom, but be ready to take out the terrorist in the master bathroom. With you approaching from the rear and teams in position near the main room, you've got a good element of surprise when hitting the living room.

One tech note: expect severe drops in frame rate when entering the living room in the suite.

TV Station Takeover

GEAR: M4A1 for entire element

DANGERS: Side 3, Level 1 is your best entry, but once inside you've got to deal with a large number of heavily armed terrorists in full body armor spread out on the first and second floors. One of the biggest initial threats will be the enemies firing down at you from the second floor. Another problem area is the black partition that separates the studio from the two hallways — expect to find both hostages and terrorists there. Finally, there's the studio itself: with only one entrance, count on at least one terrorist aiming directly at it.

TACTICS: Start in Dynamic mode — there's usually a bad guy on the other side of the door, so make sure you breach-bang-clear when entering to achieve an element of surprise. Immediately look upward through the stairs to make sure no baddies are emerging from the upper level, then have one team focus on clearing the immediate area: the hallway between the dressing rooms and the partition, and the area between the partition and the studio. Use CS grenades liberally, leaning and peeking around corners before advancing, and inspect every nook and cranny — hostages tend to hide in bathrooms and closets (so do terrorists, so be careful).

As you secure the lower area, send a team upstairs and *thoroughly* check all the rooms up there. Breach-bang-clear the door at the end of the hall; there's often a sniper waiting on the other side. After finishing upstairs, your best bet is to take cover and wait a while — usually your enemies will leave the studio and come looking for you, and the fewer in there the better! Last but not least is the long hallway with a warehouse area on one side. Expect to find a bad guy hiding between the boxes — toss in a CS before checking it out. And be extremely cautious when entering what looks like a disco and the adjoining storage area — both have numerous objects behind which bad guys can take cover (keep an eye on the bar).

Convention Center (Nighttime)

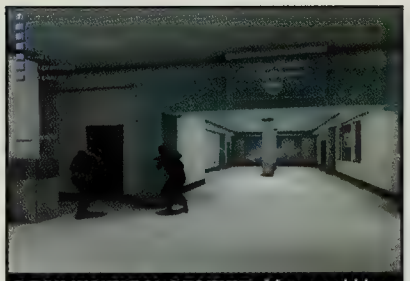
GEAR: M4A1 for entire element

DANGERS: The Convention Center's wide open areas make this one of the most challenging missions: as you move to clear the numerous rooms and locate the nuclear device, you're frequently exposed to possible fire. You've also got a huge number of diplomats and dignitaries roaming around, so you won't be able to simply open fire anytime you see someone who "looks" like a terrorist.



TV STATION TAKEOVER: After breaching the door, hang a hard right and train your gun upward. There's likely to be a hostage-taker up there — and he will shoot through the grated floor.

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CONVENTION CENTER: It's a good idea to have teams check out doors leading to the stairwells, but you or the other team need to cover their six while they do it.

TACTICS: Toss CS grenades onto the upper level before using the escalators, and be ready to open fire on the terrorists dressed as Center employees (crouch as you ride the escalator). Be especially alert for gunmen standing in doorways leading to stairs. The nuclear device is located in Room F in a small area where the sound equipment is stored, so you might want to head that way first and defuse it. Always have at least one team with "eyes on" providing cover when you're banging and clearing rooms — this is a job you can help out with by always watching your element's six as they enter new areas. The basement is literally a hornet's nest of the baddies — take it slow and easy as you search out tangos down here. It's a good idea to clear the entire hallway before entering individual rooms.

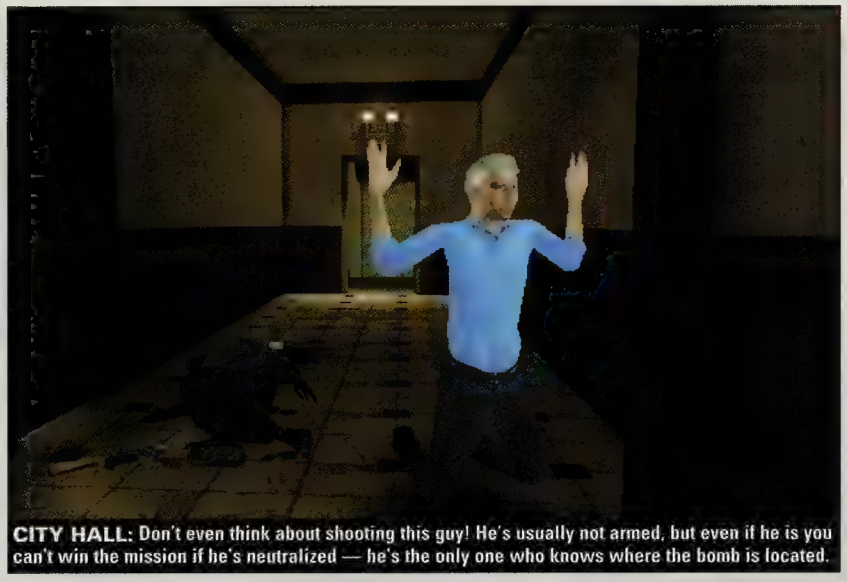
You'll be playing this one many, many times before you get the results you want. Try to maintain your cool — this ain't *Quake*, and if you start running, you'll be dead faster than you can say "thermonuclear device."

City Hall

GEAR: MP5 for entire element, FMJ recommended

DANGERS: Because the terrorists are moving between the floors, there's no way to say with certainty where the biggest threats are on this mission. One thing's for sure: there are plenty of rooms to clear, and you must guard the rear of teams making entry into those rooms whenever possible. The only exception is at the start, on the 25th floor: you should do a lot of the work there yourself so that one team can guard the crucial doorway leading up to the 26th floor.

TACTICS: There is a multitude of ways to approach this mission, but the following instructions should work well. Take the entire element to the 24th floor doorway, enter (with usual precautions), and hang a left and then a right. Order one team to stay there and cover (not in front of any doors, however) while you take the second team up to the 25th floor. Breach-bang-clear the door, then assume the responsibility of clearing each room while the team that followed you covers the exit that leads to the stairwell up to the 26th floor (and down to the 24th). Be careful that you don't kill Tobias Stromm (the guy in the blue button-down shirt and gray hair) — he's likely to be on this floor, but of course he could just as easily be somewhere else. By having the team cover the door leading to the stairwell, you're likely to get some easy kills as terrorists move down to (or up to) the 25th floor.



CITY HALL: Don't even think about shooting this guy! He's usually not armed, but even if he is you can't win the mission if he's neutralized — he's the only one who knows where the bomb is located.

When you're sure the 25th is clear, head down the stairwell and get ready to enter the library. Before you do, order the team you left on the 24th to breach-bang-clear — if you positioned them properly they'll head into the library, giving you two angles of attack on this crucial piece of real estate. Head back through the other room on the 24th floor, banging and clearing as you go.

With the 24th and 25th floors clear, all that's left is the biggest task: the 26th floor. Clear the office on the lower level of the floor before going up the stairs to the top of the building (check the armoire in the bathroom for hostages in hiding), and listen carefully to communications so you'll know when gunmen are on the balcony as you advance up the two staircases; you don't want to get popped by a shot from someone outside.

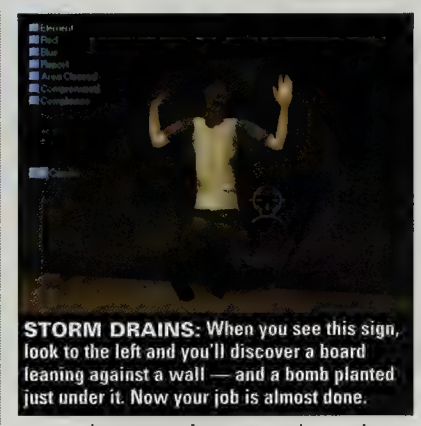
To defuse the nuclear device, first use the toolkit on the box under the table to deactivate the motion sensor, then use it again on the briefcase.

Storm Drains

GEAR: MP5SD for entire element

DANGERS: You've got several things working against you here: a time limit, bombs that must be located and defused, gas that can be detonated if you use the wrong weapon, and, of course, dark tunnels. Move quickly, but stay very alert for terrorists — there's a whole bunch of 'em down here, many in ambush positions. At least they're easy to spot because of their yellow biohazard suits.

TACTICS: Enter through the West Campus, and always bring the MP5SD. The gun choice is essential, because there are areas where you'll blow yourself to kingdom come firing an unsuppressed weapon. As you get deeper into the sewers, you'll realize this is basically a gigantic maze; drop light-sticks at junctions or entrances to help keep track of where you've been. Keep your ears open for the telltale ticking of bombs, and use the Tool Kit to defuse them. One other tip: raise the brightness level (via the Options menu) to reduce the strain of staring at all the dark passageways (and to spot enemies more quickly, too!).



STORM DRAINS: When you see this sign, look to the left and you'll discover a board leaning against a wall — and a bomb planted just under it. Now your job is almost done.

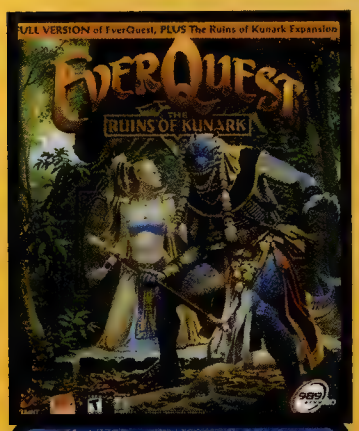
Because of the complexity of the level and space limitations, there's no way to give you a complete walkthrough here (though if you're *really* stuck you can check out a good one at *www.forevergreens.com/swat3/swat3sewer-walkthrough.htm*). Here's where you'll find the buggers:

- On a ledge in tunnel
- In a shopping basket in room with fire in barrel
- Under a staircase, behind a board leaning against the wall (there's a "Notice: Authorized Personnel Only" sign in this area)
- Beside a washing machine in a room full of tires
- On a tire beside fallen debris in a room full of gas
- On a landing overlooking a walkway and sewer (red light overhead)
- Under three barrels beside an exit at the top of drain system

PCG

EverQuest® The Ruins of Kunark™

Now Taking ReQUESTS



Machine: PC **Publisher:** 989 Studios
Genre: Online RPG **# of Players:** Thousands

"The most addictive online role playing game in existence is about to get another infusion. The **EverQuest** expansion, **Ruins of Kunark**, introduces an entire new player race, a huge new continent, and a plethora of new monsters, dungeons, items, and cities. Along with modifications to the existing engine to allow for even more advancement of current characters, this is one expansion that will inspire an entire new wave of addiction in players. We're literally beating up members of Verant and 989 Studios for an inside peek." — **DailyRadar.com**





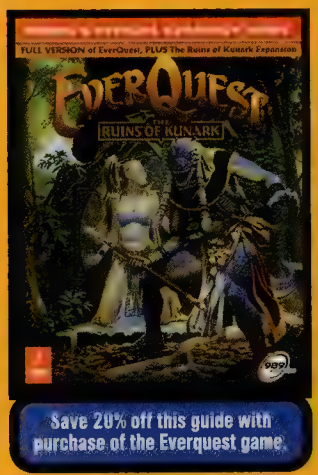
Iksar Shadowknight battles a Lycanthrope in Warslik's Wood.



Troll and Iksar hunt a Forest Giant in the Field of Bone.



Troll and Giant Scorpion fight to the death near the buried city of Kaesora.



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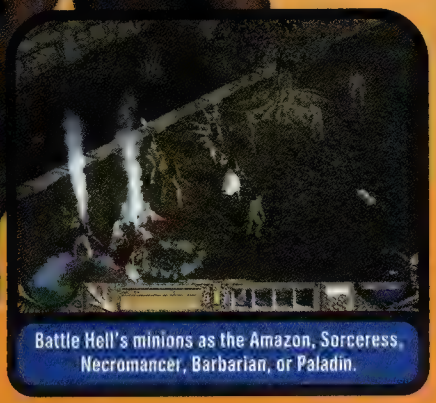
software etc

DIABLO II

Machine: PC
Publisher: Havas/Blizzard
Genre: RPG/Action
of Players: Eight

Fear, Paranoia & Terror. Guarantee Yours Today!

"The best gets better. **Diablo II** will likely be an early candidate for game of the year ... There are now five classes of player character – amazon, barbarian, necromancer, paladin, and sorceress. Each class offers characters 30 unique skills, arranged in skill trees ... The random level generation that made the original Diablo so timeless will remain for **Diablo II**, and with vast improvements ... **Diablo II**, far from being a simple retread, will open up a whole new world of hellspawn goodness ... Hands down, **Diablo II** is the most eagerly awaited title of the coming year ..." – **DailyRadar.com**



Battle Hell's minions as the Amazon, Sorceress, Necromancer, Barbarian, or Paladin.



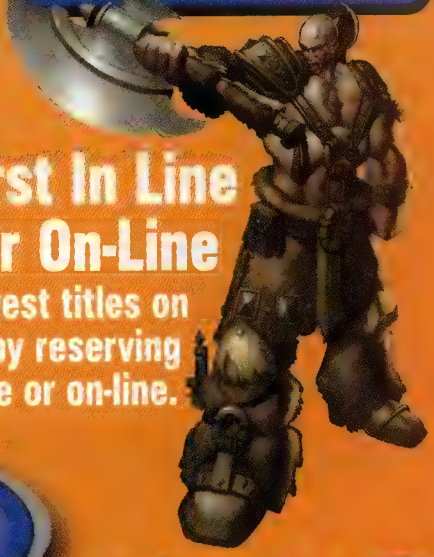
Challenge the ultimate evil over four expansive realms.



Harness the energies of light and darkness with arcane new spells and enchantments.



Real gamers will want to add Unraveler and Barbarian to their collection. Watch for the upcoming release of these action figures plus the Diablo II figure when the game hits.



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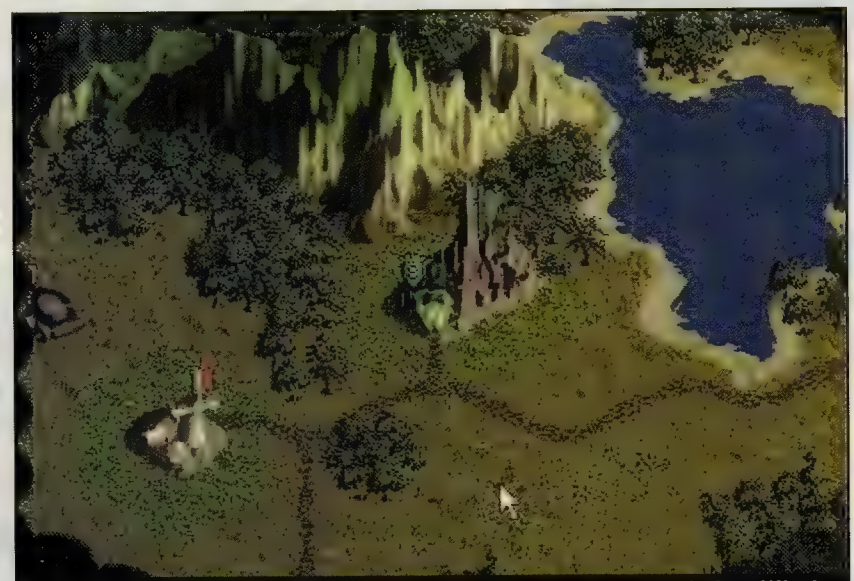
Babbage's & Software Etc.

Babbage's

software etc

Cheater's Corner

Some people would consider cheating to be a sign of weakness. Of course, you shouldn't let that stop you from using these little morsels of cheating power that we've discovered for you. After all, we know that no one's perfect. Just don't blame us if you feel dirty afterwards.



With just a little command line editing, you too can become an unstoppable force in *Age of Wonders*.

Age of Wonders

Change your command line from *aow.exe* to *aow.exe beatrix*. You can do this by right clicking on the shortcut icon you use to start the game and clicking on the properties tab. The line that you need to edit will be in the space under the "Target" heading. Now, after starting the game you can press *Control*, *Shift*, and *C* to activate the cheats. You'll hear a sound if you do this correctly. Next, just type in any of the codes below:

Acquire 1000 gold
Acquire 1000 mana
Acquire all independent towns
Win level
Lose level
Toggle fog
Toggle exploration
Free movement mode
Acquire all spells
Research all spells

Battlezone II: Combat Commander

During the game, press *CTRL* and ~ and the console will appear. Now enter one of these codes:

Ai.winmission — instantly wins mission
Game.cheat bztnt — infinite ammo
Game.cheat bzbody — gives infinite shields
Game.cheat bzfree — gives infinite pilots and resources
Game.cheat bzradar — shows the entire map
Game.cheat bzview — gives instant comsat link
14 play isdf — play as ISDF after mission
14 play scion — play as Scion after mission

Delta Force 2

During gameplay, press ~ to bring up the console menu and enter the following codes:

Thetrooper — Invincibility
Diewithyourbootson — Infinite ammo
Sunandsteel — Full reload of ammo
Stilllife — Turns you invisible
Revelations — Gives you eight rounds of artillery

Half-Life: Opposing Force

First off, edit your command line using the same process detailed under *AoW* to read as follows: *hl.exe -dev -console -game gearbox*. Then start the game. You may now press ~ during gameplay to bring up the console. Enter any of the codes below to activate the cheats:



Use the cheat to turn god mode on in *Half-Life: Opposing Force*, and you'll never need a medic and his needles again.

/god — God mode
/impulse 101 — All weapons, full ammo
/noclip — Turn off clipping
/give ammo_556 — Ammo for M249 SAW
/give ammo_762 — Ammo for sniper rifle
/give weapon_(insert weapon name here) — Gives named weapon
/give (item name) — Gives named item
/map (map name) — Play any level; Level names — ofboot0, ofboot1, ofboot2, ofboot3, ofboot4, of0a0, of1a1, of1a2, of1a3, of1a4, of1a4b, of1a5, of2a1, of2a1b, of2a2, of2a3, of2a4, of2a5, of2a5b, of3a1, of3a2, of3a3, of3a4, of3a5, of3a6, of4a1, of4a2, of4a3, of4a4, of4a5, of5a1, of5a2, of5a3, of5a4, of6a1, of6a2, of6a3, of6a4, of6a4b, of6a5, of7a0

Interstate '82

While in the game, press *ESC* and enter a code from the list below. Then press *ESC* again to turn on the cheat.

Cuddle — Vehicle invincibility
Hugs — All friendly vehicles will be in god mode
Syrup — Freeze all CPU vehicles
Caress — Full ammo
Imlame — Go to next mission
Kiss — Blows up currently targeted vehicle
Love — Kills all opponents on your radar
Nukeme — Suicide

Mortyr

Press ~ during gameplay to bring up the console, then enter the following codes.

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.prezes — God mode
.wp — Gives all guns and inventory items
.goto (level number) — select level

NOX

During gameplay, hit *F1* to enter the console menu. Type *Racoiaws* to turn on the cheat mode. Next, enter the cheats from below:

set god — God mode
cheat ability — Resets abilities
cheat goto — Goes to location; put in the x and y coordinates
cheat health — Gives health
cheat mana — Gives mana
cheat level x — Levels up character
cheat spells x — Gives spells; put in a number (x), and it gives you all the spells for that level
cheat gold — Gives gold
help cheat — Displays cheat list

Rayman 2: The Great Escape

Press *ESC* to bring up the cheat menu, and then enter one of the codes:

Gothere — Select level
Glowfist — More firepower
Gimmelife — Gives five more lives
Gimmelumz — Gives five more lumz

Revenant

Press *ENTER* during gameplay and type in any of these cheats:

Alreadydead — Full health
Abracadabra — Limitless mana, every spell, and every crest
Nahkranoth — Kill all bad guys with one hit
Alchemy — Gives 999,999 gold pieces
Dummies — Turns off AI
Gimmesomegrub — Gives food
Noamnesia — More life, mana, and stamina
Potionsnlotions — Get more potions
Lookunderthehood — Pressing *F12* brings you to the game editor

Rollercoaster Tycoon: Corkscrew Follies

Enter the following as guest names:

Chris Sawyer — Get a photographer guest
Simon Foster — Get a painter guest
Melanie Warn — Get a happy guest
Katie Brayshaw — Get a waving guest
John Mace — Double payment for rides guest
John Wardley — Extremely satisfied guest
Damon Hill — Faster go-carts

The Sims

While in Live mode during gameplay, press *CTRL*, *SHIFT*, *ALT*, and *C* to display a console in the upper left-hand corner of the screen. Now enter any of the following cheat codes:

Klapaucius — Gives 1,000 simoleons
Interests — Lets you change personality and interests
water_tool — Gives an island home
map_edit on — Map Editor
set_hour (1-24) — Set time of day
grow_grass (1-150) — Set rate of grass growth

SWAT 3: Close Quarters Battle

While playing, press *SHIFT* and ~ to bring up the console. Next, enter any of the cheats below:

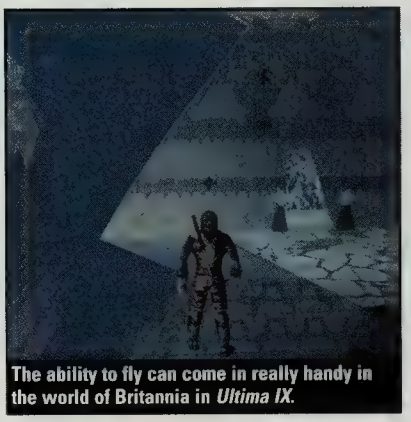
Swatlord — Makes entire team invulnerable
Biggerpockets — Unlimited ammo
Doubleshot — Fire in pulses
nc17 — More gore
iamleet — Beat current mission
noshades — All missions played during daytime
casual — Play without uniform
hotstuff — Makes the game harder
Justin — Suspects never surrender
Johnwoo — Slow motion
Whosyourboss — Forces teammate to open fire

Ultima IX: Ascension

Use wordpad or any other .txt file editor to open the default.kmp file located in your *Ultima IX* directory. Find the line [Cheat Commands]. Directly beneath it, type in the following:

alt+shift+i=toggle_avatar_invulnerable
alt+shift+1=toggle_avatar_fly

Now, while in the game, press *ALT*, *SHIFT*, and *i* or *1* to turn on the cheats.



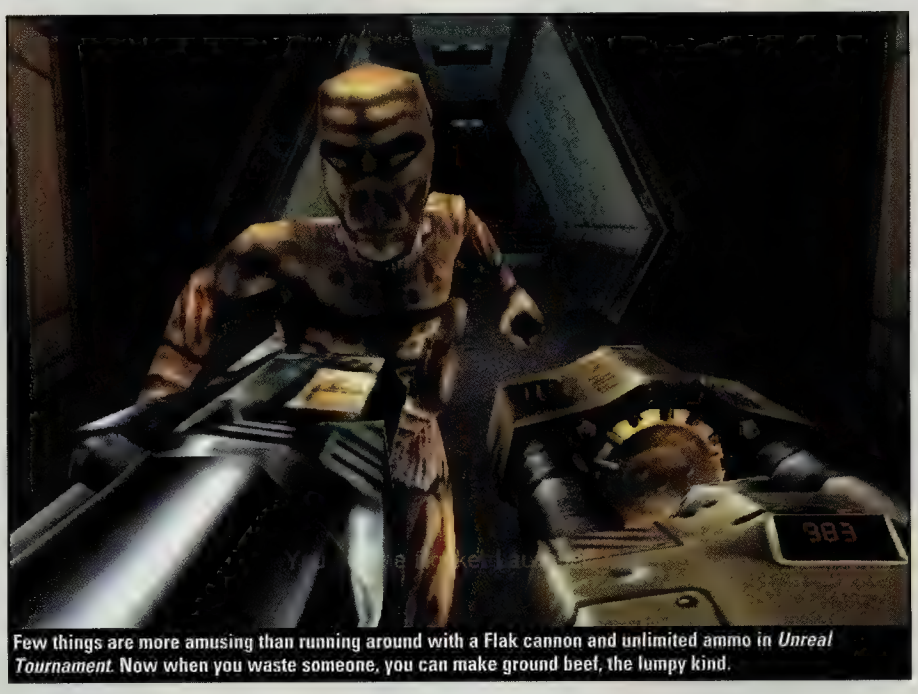
The ability to fly can come in really handy in the world of Britannia in *Ultima IX*.

Unreal Tournament

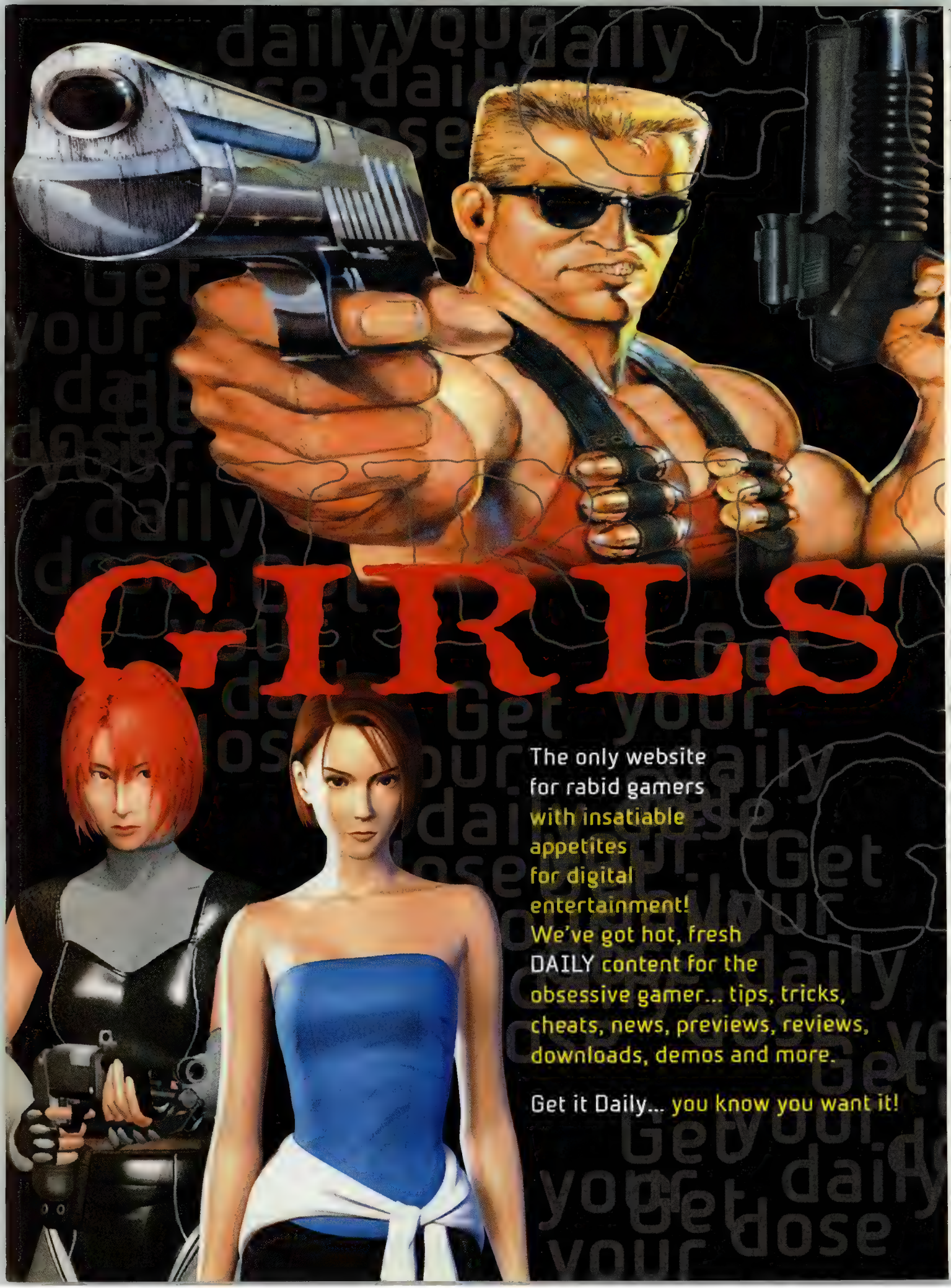
During gameplay press the ~ key to open the console. Type *iamtheone* and press enter. You may use any of the cheats below:

Allammo — full ammo for weapons currently in your inventory
God — invincibility
behindview 0 — Default view
behindview 1 — Third-person view
fly — You can fly around
ghost — Turns off clipping
walk — Turns off ghost and fly
loaded — Gives all weapons
playersonly — Freeze time
open (map name) — Skip to map
summon (item name) — Give item

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Few things are more amusing than running around with a Flak cannon and unlimited ammo in *Unreal Tournament*. Now when you waste someone, you can make ground beef, the lumpy kind.


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Snub of the Year Award

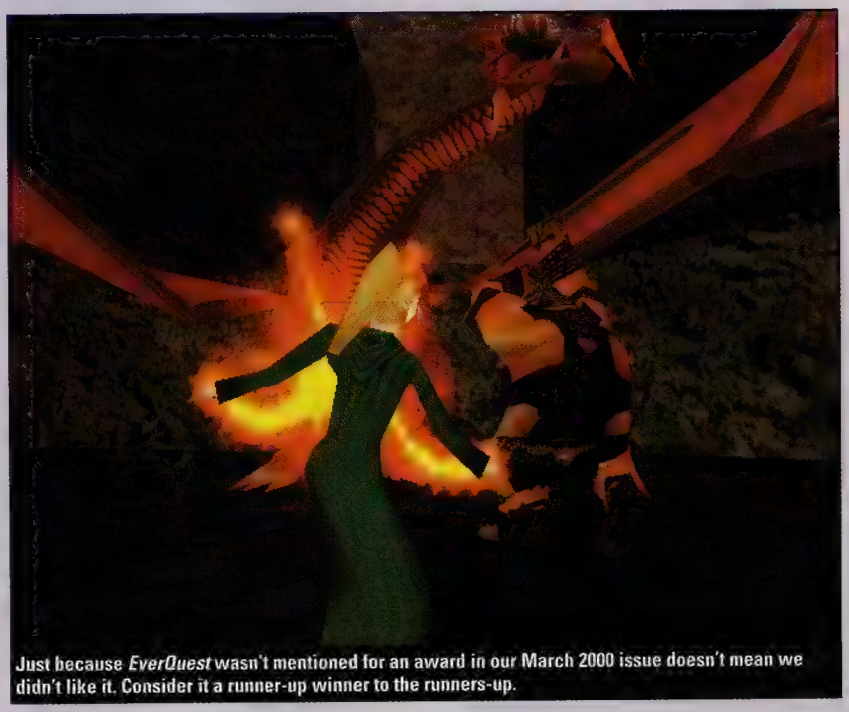
After reading your March 2000 issue — and after much thought about the subject — I have decided that you left out a critical category in your Sixth Annual *PC Gamer* Awards article. I'm thinking you may need to add the Snub of the Year category, with *EverQuest* as the winner. Not only was it left out of the roleplaying category, it was left out of the multiplayer category as well! Was this breathtaking early 1999 release somehow forgotten in the frenzy created by some run-of-the-mill, rehashed sequel to a 3D shooter with a fair-to-middling plot, a pretty opening sequence, and a modified graphics engine? I don't know!

But enough with my tirade — while I do realize that many players of *EverQuest* do not roleplay too terribly well, I do feel that this game has nearly done the impossible and done it well. By that I mean the game world is constantly updated, the downtime is minimal (especially for an online 3D game world), the bandwidth requirements aren't so great that they would choke an elephant, the graphics are stunning, and the game is completely immersive! What else can you ask for in a roleplaying game?

This game is the best computer game alternative to pen and paper roleplaying that I've ever seen (and I'm pretty sure I'm not the only person with that opinion), yet there is no mention of it anywhere in your write-up.

— Mike Cooke, *via the Internet*

Thanks for your comments, Mike. We agree that EverQuest *is an excellent game, but we all felt that the "run-of-the-mill"* System Shock 2 *was the best roleplaying game of the year, by far. You have to remember, too, that the awards are based on the opinions of the editorial team that make up the magazine at the time, and none of us felt that* EverQuest *was better than any of the winners or runners-up in either the roleplaying or multiplayer category. Now, if new editor-in-chief Rob Smith were here at that time, it might have been a different story altogether. He refers to the game as* EverCrack, *a tribute to its addictive quality.*



Just because *EverQuest* wasn't mentioned for an award in our March 2000 issue doesn't mean we didn't like it. Consider it a runner-up winner to the runners-up.

Another Angry Canadian

Now you've done it! You've gone ahead and pissed off your Canadian readers. I have every issue of your magazine from the very beginning, and I constantly struggle with my girlfriend in an effort to stop her from throwing out the back issues. After going through so much effort, you'd think you guys wouldn't alienate me by making every damned contest in your mag only open to Americans! I understand that you can't open every contest to Somalia or Ecuador, but you have no excuse for cutting out your neighbors to the North. Please don't tell me you can't afford the postage.

— Steve Blackman, *via the Internet*

We understand your anger, Steve, but it's really not our fault. We would love to be able to give prizes to our cherished Canadian readers, but our hands are tied by your country's laws. In order for us to allow Canadian residents to enter a contest (and this is not just a one time thing — it would have to be done for each and every contest we run separately), we'd have to file a load of paperwork and pay all kinds of fees. If we were to try and do this, we wouldn't be able to afford to pay the postage…or much of anything else. This same situation applies when certain states are excluded. I hope that clears things up a little for everyone, and that you can understand why we have to do it this way.

> I have every issue from the beginning, and I struggle with my girlfriend in an effort to stop her from throwing out the back issues.

Responding to the Sierra Response

I recently read your Q&A session with David Grenewetzki regarding the shut downs and cancellations made by Havas Interactive (nee Sierra) *[See the March 2000* PC Gamer *Eyewitness section for the full story]*. Although I'd like to have a chance for a proper rebuttal, I understand that wouldn't be terribly good form.

Mr. Grenewetzki suggests that the product (*Navy SEALs*), which had a fraction of the development time that *SWAT 3* had already garnered, was somehow inherently inferior, and the team somehow was not up to the task of developing a Triple-A title. This was — and is — simply not the case. And for him to

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somehow cast the entire studio in the negative light of anything less than a dedicated group of gamers, as well as talented and professional developers, is an insult to the men and women whose lives were so cavalierly disrupted.

Across the spectrum of the industry and among the fans there is an understanding of the realities of market growth, consolidation, restructuring and the endless list of catchphrases that bean counters like to use to (sometimes) justify their not always correct decisions. Of that I have no argument. But in the particular case of Sierra and the Oakhurst Studio, I do not want the fans and the industry left with the impression that the decisions of Mr. Grenewetzki were handled in any way short of a corporate sanctioned bloodletting that was based as much on popular opinion among Sierra Bellevue's core upper management as the cold exigencies of the market.

— Paul Robinson, Game designer, *Navy SEALs, via the Internet*

Paul also asked that we make clear that these comments are solely his opinions and do not reflect those of his employer. Thanks for your comments, Paul.

The Cult of Jeremy

In your March 2000 issue, you said that disc editor Jeremy had a dark side and that he was planning something evil. Well, I just have to tell you — I'm with Jeremy. He is more powerful and skilled than anyone in the *PC Gamer* office. I'm getting on his good side because he will take over, and only then you will fully realize Jeremy's supernatural powers.

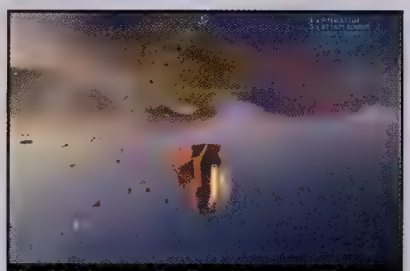


If you're smart like Joe Muzzo (a.k.a. Muzzle), you too will start paying homage to the dark and evil Jeremy.

It will start when Jeremy beats you at all the multiplayer games. Then he will get to review all of the good games. After that, he will destroy anyone who gets in his way — just look at Hammy if you don't believe me. Only his followers will survive, and I'm making sure I get on the bandwagon early. It may not be today, it may not be tomorrow, but someday soon, you will feel Jeremy's wrath.

— Joe Muzzo, *via the Internet*

Jeremy Responds: Let is be known that Joe Muzzo has been accepted into my cult. He will hereafter be known as Muzzle, which keeps the jaws of the Doberman from the flesh of man. He is to be revered as he reveres me. And he will make me apple pie twice a month, and pour my colas into frosty mugs. As for the rest of you, send an e-mail to innocencelost@pcgamer.com *to qualify for membership into my cult.*



Our 1999 Game of the Year, *Homeworld*, is yet another game that we dominate in multiplayer match-ups — despite the feeble attempts of *PC Exaggerator* to convince you otherwise.

PC Exaggerator Strikes Again

I really enjoy your magazine and have been a subscriber for several years now. Your game reviews have helped me avoid buying some stinkers that I was about to plunk down my hard-earned money on. I thank you. My wife thanks you. My dog thanks you.

Now that the butt-kissing is over, I have run across something I find very distressing. I picked up a copy of your competitor's magazine for comparison and found that *PC Gamer* is by far the better of the two magazines (I know, I know — I thought I was done kissing butt too...sorry). However, I read something that I must confirm with you before becoming more upset than I already am. They were giving their choice for Game of the Year, and one of their contenders was *Homeworld*. In their review they said, "Any game that allows Ed to single-handedly whup the butts of four guys from *PC Gamer* is tops in our book."

That's not really true, is it? One guy from this other magazine beat four guys from *PC Gamer*? I rely on your abilities as competent gamers to supply accurate reviews on games. But if one guy can "whup the butts" of four of *PC Gamers'* guys, my faith may be shattered. At least, tell me that these were four one-on-one games, not a single four-on-one game. Please!

On top of that, you name *Homeworld* as Game of the Year. Would you really give a Game of the Year title to a game in which the guys at *PC Gamer* suffered what must be the most devastating loss of their careers...to another gaming magazine? Say it ain't so!

— Mark (A wandering soul), *via the Internet*

As a "supposed" loyal reader, you should know better than to trust the word of the buffoons at PC Exaggerator, *Mark. In fact, Rob Smith, our new editor-in-chief and former executive editor of that smelly rag, was so fed up with the motley bunch that he begged to join us. Fortunately for him, we had an opening. We still catch him in a boastful lie every now and then (the conditioning of the staff members runs deep over there), but we're sure he'll soon recover with our help.*

Help Is On the Way

I've recently become embroiled in an ongoing debate with friends of mine concerning the PC as a gaming platform versus the console game machines. My argument is that the PC can offer more depth, larger game environments, much better sound and video, and easier access to Internet or multiplayer action.

After one bitter and passionate debate, it was brought to my attention that at the rate the console games are improving by adding Internet access, more detailed and sharper video imagery, clearer CD quality sound, and a lower price tag, that the future will belong to the console and not the PC.

I've seen games on the consoles, and I have to tell you, I'm starting to run out of ammo for this debate. Some of the games I've seen are incredibly good,



If your console-playing buddies are getting on you about how buggy PC games are, just whip out a copy of *Vigilante 8: Second Offense* for the Dreamcast — that'll shut 'em up real quick. Whew, that game is stinky!

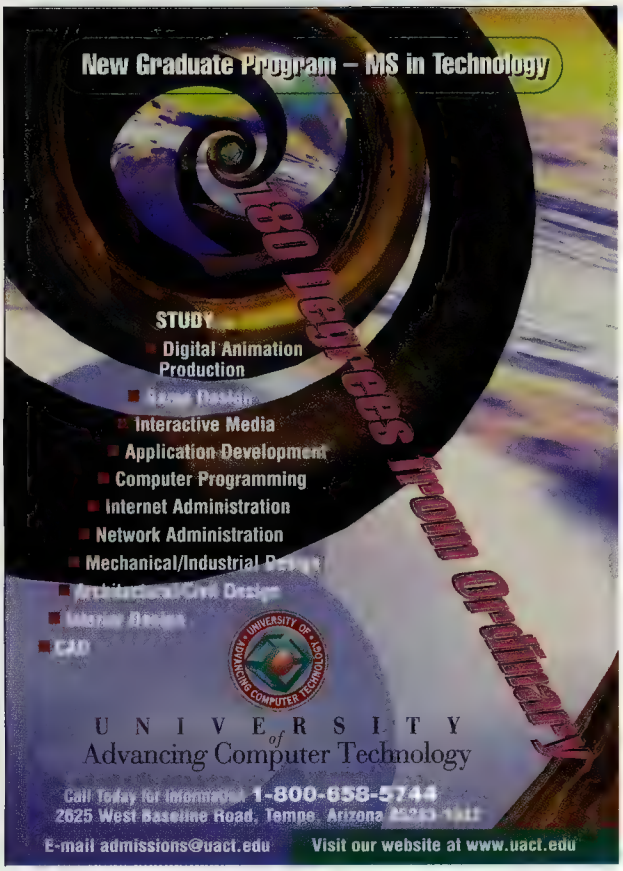
while others are duds; pretty much the same as our PC games. However, most of the released games for the consoles are finished products with no need for a "patch-it later" attitude. I must admit that I'm getting a little frustrated with PC games that I've been waiting for forever to come out only to be unfinished and buggy (you know the ones I'm talking about — shame on you, Lord British).

So, seeing that I love your mag, and that you're the guys/gals (winks at Lisa) in the know, I could certainly use some of that much-needed debate ammo. Keep up the gaming, and please poke Jay with a new and improved pointy stick.

— Robert Bartholomew, *via the Internet*

Hang on for one more month Robert and keep the faith. One of our features next month will take an in-depth look at the state of PC gaming, and explain why we think it's still, and will continue to be, the best platform for gaming. To "console" yourself in the meantime, go pick up a copy of the unfinished Gran Turismo 2 *for the PlayStation or the buggy* Vigilante 8: Second Offense *for the Dreamcast. Those two games should give you a little ammo to fend off those buddies of yours.* PCG





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A legend of level design, Richard Gray is currently crafting the locales of Ritual's* Heavy Metal 2000 *(formerly* FAKK2*). From a "superhero-in-the-making," sit back and witness the world according to …

LEVELORD

How the devil are you?
I believe the Devil is in fact directly related to my being. I'm doing quite well, of course. Still cranking out levels, my dream job. Actually, it's my dream hobby that I somehow found a way to get paid for…thanks, Nick [Newhart]!

What was the first computer game you ever played?
Colossal Cave! I was at a Hewlett-Packard DP Management training session back in 1982, and they made the mistake of having a few games on the mainframe to help the neophytes get computer-friendly.



Levelord loses his head to Rob Atkins, Ritual's art director.

How did you get into the games industry?
Passion! I knew a COBOL programmer didn't have the skill set, which was the reason I then went to UCLA for an engineering degree. I still couldn't cut the mustard, though, even with a high-powered degree. It wasn't until 10 years later when I found level designing with *Doom* and DEU. Then I became a real addict and didn't even think about getting hired; I only thought about making levels. The passion!

What's the worst game you've ever been involved in making?
The best and the worst was *Sin*. It's like Robert Atkins says, "*Sin* was the best game *never* played". We all know the story of *Sin* by now, and there's no reason to make me cry again.

What's the best game you've played recently?
I'm still addicted to *Age of Empires*. This job is very time-consuming and, for me, playing games after work is a lot like working in a pizzeria and going home to have pizza for dinner. I *love* pizza, but…you know.

And the worst?
That's not fair! It's one thing for a reviewer to pick from the bottom of the list, but as a fellow game developer, it wouldn't be appropriate for me to say.

What's the greatest moment in the history of gaming?
Doom, hands down and with no doubts. Although *Ultima IV* had such impact as to lower my GPA at UCLA by at least two full points, it was *Doom* (and DEU) that will forever be remembered as *the* greatest moments.

Have you ever been arrested?
Not as a civilian, although I've come close. I have spent time in a Navy brig for, shall we say, enjoying some Californian Salad on base.

If there was one thing about the games business that you could smite with one mighty blow, what would it be?
Cutting edge technology! I am so sick and tired of chasing that beast. So little time is spent on the Fun Factor because we have to make everything flash and spin.

Violence in gaming: legitimate concern or media hysteria?
I don't think there's *anything* wrong with violence in computer games. It's there because the audience wants it. I do think it's wrong that the audience wants it.

What would a psychiatric report of you say?
Funny you should ask. With 1999 being what it was, I now have two therapists! The report? Although he has the appearance of satisfaction and goodwill, inside lies an angry and frustrated little boy who's just waiting for the right moment to…

What do you have in your pockets right now?
My tattered wallet, a comb, and a note pad/pen in the back pockets. A little money, two Connecticut quarters, Dad's pocket knife, keys, a pack of Mules and lighter, and, oh yes, my work bowl (you can take the sailor out of the brig, but you can't take the bowl out of the sailor).

What are you most likely to complain about in a hotel?
I missed the Metallica concert by merely a day!

What music would you have played at your funeral?
Led Zeppelin and Yes, with a smattering of Nine Inch Nails.

> ***"We all know the story of Sin by now, and there's no reason to make me cry again."***

Online gaming: over-rated fad or inexorable future?
Definitely the future! Say goodbye to Hollywood as we know it. Similar to the transition from radio to television back in the late 1950s and early 1960s, interactive games will have the same effect on passive entertainment.

What game do you really wish somebody would make?
Warriors…remember that movie? Kind of quirky, but it was cool to imagine being a gang and having to negotiate your way through New York City. Although I said I hate cutting-edge technology, for this one I would want an exact replica of The City down to its finest details. The buildings and projects, sewers, smells…everything that makes New York, New York. PCG

PC GAMER
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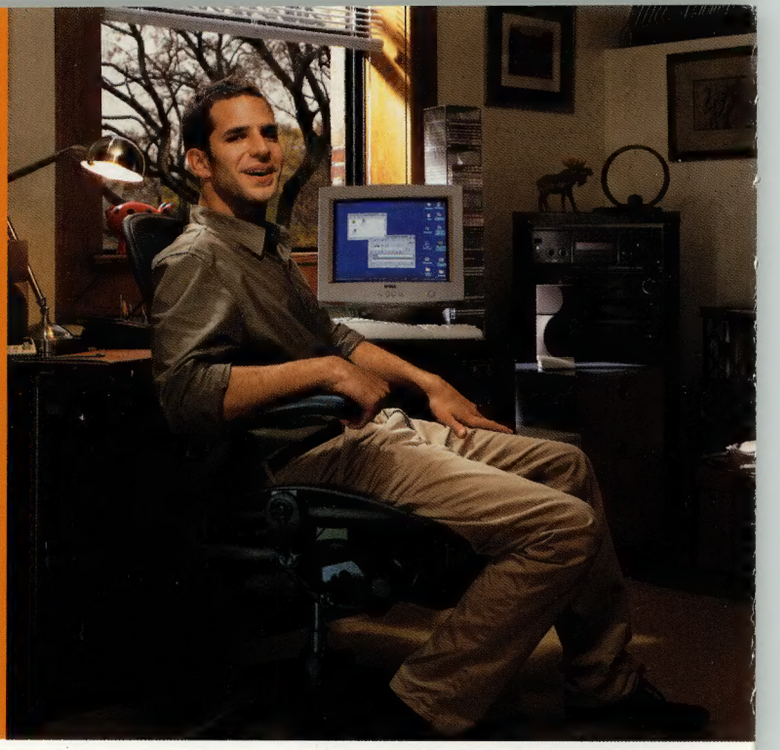
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Thanks for joining us.

There was a shout from the rooftops. "The English are coming. The English are coming." Terrified citizens ran for cover. They had seen the English before. The memories were still vivid. Too vivid. Could it be that they were back again? So soon?

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